Al-Mīzān

An Exegesis of the Qur'an

ʿAllāmah al-Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥusayn al-Ṭabāṭabāʾī

Translated by: Alexander Khaleeli

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In the Name of Allah,
the Beneficent, the Merciful.

All praise is due to Allah, the Lord of the Worlds;
the Beneficent, the Merciful;
the Master of the Day of Judgment;
Thee only we serve, and to Thee alone we beseech
for help;
Guide us in the straight path;
The path of those upon whom Thou hast bestowed
favors,not of those against whom Thou art
wrathful, nor of those who are astray.

~

O' Allah! send Your blessings to the head of
Your messengers and the last of
Your prophets,
Muḥammad and his pure and cleansed progeny.
Also send Your blessings to all Your
prophets and envoys.

Contents

Publisher's Note vii
Foreword viii

Chapter 52 (Sūrah al–Ṭūr)

Verses 1–10 1
Examining Narrations 4
Verses 11–28 6
Examining Narrations 16
Verses 29–44 18
Verses 45–49 25
Examining Narrations 28

Chapter 53 (Sūrah al–Najm)

Verses 1–18 29
Examining Narrations 38
Verses 19–32 44
Verses 33–62 54
Examining Narrations 65

Chapter 54 (Sūrah al–Qamar)

Verses 1–8 69
Examining Narrations 75
A Discourse on the Miraculous Splitting of the Moon 76
Verses 9–42 83
On the Meaning of Good-fated and Ill-fated Days 89
Discourse On Heavenly Bodies 93
Discourse on Taking Omens from Worldly Events 96
Examining Narrations 104
Verses 43–55 106
Examining Narrations 114
A Discussion on the Meaning of *Qadar* (Determination) 116

Chapter 55 (Sūrah al–Raḥmān)

Verses 1–29 119
Examining Narrations 133
Verses 30–78 136
Examining Narrations 149

Chapter 56 (Sūrah al–Wāqiʿa)

Verses 1–10 153
Examining Narrations 157
Verses 11–56 160
Examining Narrations 170
Verses 57–96 175
Examining Narrations 190

Chapter 57 (Sūrah al–Hadīd)

Verses 1–6 194
Examining Narrations 200
Verses 7–15 204
Examining Narrations 216
Verses 16–24 218
Examining Narrations 230
Verses 25–29 232
Examining Narrations 239

Arabic Transliteration Key

Arabic Letters	Transliteration	Arabic Letters	Transliteration
ا	ā	ع	ʿ
ب	b	غ	gh
ت	t	ف	f
ث	th	ق	q
ج	j	ك	k
ح	ḥ	ل	l
خ	kh	م	m
د	d	ن	n
ذ	dh	ه	h
ر	r	و	w/ū
ز	z	ى	y/ī
س	s	ء	ʾ
ش	sh	ة	-
ص	ṣ	ـَ	a
ض	ḍ	ـَ	i
ط	ṭ	ـُ	u
ظ	ẓ		

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Publisher's Note

In an effort to make the text more accessible to English-speaking readers, the editors have chosen to use English names for the prophets and figures (as listed below but not limited to) and to use Anglicized terms that now appear in English dictionaries.

Ādam	Adam	Mūsā	Moses
Dāwūd	David	Sulaymān	Solomon
Hārūn	Aaron	Shuʿayb	Jethro
Ibrāhīm	Abraham	Yaʿqūb	Jacob
ʿĪsā	Jesus	ʾAyyūb	Job
Isḥāq	Isaac	Yūshaʿ	Joshua
Ismāʿīl	Ishmael	Yūsuf	Joseph
Jibrāʾīl	Gabriel	Zakariyyā	Zachariah
Maryam	Mary	ʿUzayr	Ezra

Arabic terms and names have been transliterated according to the *International Journal of Middle East Studies* (*IJMES*).

For ease of reading, glyphs and traditional honorifics such as "peace be upon him" or which are commonly used as a gesture of respect after the name of the Prophet Muhammad, the Imāms, or other sacred figures have been omitted from this text. No disrespect is intended, and may God's peace and blessings be upon them all!

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Foreword

This volume features ʿAllāmah Ṭabāṭabāʾī's commentary on the chapters of the Qurʾan: al-Ṭūr (52), al-Najm (53), al-Qamar (54), al-Raḥmān (55), al-Wāqiʿa (56), and al-Ḥadīd (57). As other introductions in this series will have already discussed the author's intellectual biography and the methodology which he used in composing his seminal exegesis of the Qurʾan, this introduction will instead deliver an overview of the contents of this volume and highlight their principal themes.

The first chapter in this volume is al-Ṭūr (52, 'the Mount'), which takes its name from the oath God swears at its beginning, *By the Mount* (52:1). Its first half evokes vivid imagery and metaphors to describe the Day of Judgement and the rewards and punishments that await believers and disbelievers in the Hereafter. It then turns to the disbelievers and rebukes them for the ignorance, idolatry, and rejection of the Prophet. Particular attention is given (from 52:29 onwards) to their accusations of him being a soothsayer, a madman, or a poet and the chapter undertakes to refute each and every possible objection they could conceive of to the Prophet's mission—and these number sixteen in total. Ṭabāṭabāʾī deftly expounds each of these arguments based on the Qurʾan's record of them, giving us an insight into the mindset of the Prophet's opponents in Mecca and how those hostile to his mission tried to make sense of it without acknowledging its divine nature.

Like the chapter before it, al-Najm (53, 'the Star') takes its name from the opening oath, *By the star when it sets* (53:1). It begins with a discourse on the Prophet's experience of receiving revelations from the Angel Gabriel and, significantly, a description of his Night Journey (*Isrāʾ*) through the heavens. In its next section, it discusses the idols of the Quraysh, criticizes their polytheistic beliefs, and explains the nature of intercession and forgiveness, before emphasizing God's power and knowledge. Its final section begins by condemning a man who offered to bear the sins of another, and calls attention to God's omnipotence through recounting the wonders of His creation and naming the peoples He has destroyed for disobedience.

The next chapter, al-Qamar (54, 'the Moon') takes its name from the splitting of the moon described in its first verse, *The Hour has drawn near and the moon is split* (54:1). In its course, the chapter discusses the Prophet's miracle

of splitting the moon, and the disbelief of his people despite his warnings of the Day of Judgement. The chapter then recounts the stories of past nations, including the people of Noah, ʿĀd, Thamūd, Lot, and Pharaoh, who were punished for their denial of warnings. The chapter emphasizes that the people of the Prophet are no mightier than these past nations and cannot thwart God's will. It ends with glad tidings for the faithful. Of particular interest in Ṭabaṭabāʾi's commentary on this chapter are his extended discussions on both the Prophetic miracle of splitting the moon and on the idea of certain days being auspicious or inauspicious and the validity of signs, omens, and astrology from an Islamic point of view.

Sūrah al-Raḥmān (55, 'the All-beneficent') is a deeply evocative and poetic chapter, which derives its name from one of the most beautiful names of God, 'the All-beneficent.' The chapter extols the countless bounties and blessings that God has bestowed upon His creation, urging the audience of humans and jinn (signified by the copious use of the dual form) to reflect on the mercy and compassion that underpin the very fabric of existence. The repeated refrain, " *So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?* serves as a powerful rhetorical device, compelling the reader to acknowledge the innumerable signs of divine grace that permeate the cosmos. Duality is a theme that runs throughout the chapter. In addition to the use of the dual form to address the humans and the jinn, the dualities in God's creation, such as the heavens and the earth and the land of the sea, are also emphasized. Equally, the cosmos is divided into two stages of existence, the creation of this world, and the creation of the next, in which the opposites of felicity and misery and blessings and afflictions will be utterly distinct from one another. Tabāṭabāʾi's exegetical brilliance is on full display here as he unpacks the succinct and often allusive language of the chapter's verses and reveals their eloquence to the reader.

In Sūrah Al-Waqiʿa (56, 'the Imminent Event'), the Qurʾan once again turns its attention to the Day of Judgement, delineating the various categories of people and the corresponding outcomes they will face—the People of the Right Hand, the People of the Left Hand, and the Foremost Ones. The chapter places a strong emphasis on the importance of personal accountability and the consequences of one's actions in this life, thereby underscoring the necessity for sincere faith and righteous conduct. This chapter also highlights the importance of seeking knowledge and the pursuit of wisdom, as they are considered critical means for spiritual growth and the attainment of divine proximity. It closes with a visceral portrayal of the last moments before a person's death, before equivocating between what is ultimate fate will be: either

ease, abundance, and a garden of bliss (56:89), or *a treat of boiling water and entry into hell* (56:94), driving home the existential importance of faith to the audience.

Sūrah al-Ḥadīd (57, 'Iron') is the final chapter in this volume and received its name from the verse, ... *and We sent down iron, in which there is great might and uses for mankind* (57:25). The central concern of this chapter is to encourage the faithful to spend in the way of God, as it frequently encourages them to do so. The chapter begins by praising and glorifying God and invoking His names to encourage the faithful to spend in His way. This highlights that God does not ask for spending due to any need or want on His part. Similar opening styles are seen in other chapters, such as Sūrah al-Ḥashr, al-Ṣaff, al-Jumuʿa, al-Taghābun.

To conclude, I want to reiterate my gratitude towards the Tawheed Institute of Australia for their contributions, and particularly acknowledge the unwavering dedication of Ali Khalfan. Their efforts have made it possible for English readers to access this modern-day masterpiece of Qur'anic interpretation by a prominent figure in Islamic intellectual history from the previous century, in its complete form for the first time.

Alexander Khaleeli (Translator)
London, UK
May, 2023

Chapter 52

Sūrah al–Ṭūr ('The Mount')

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بِسۡمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the most Merciful, the most Compassionate

Verses 1–10

The aim of this chapter is to warn those who deny the truth and exhibit arrogance of the punishment that awaits them on the Day of Judgement. It opens by announcing the punishment of which they were warned and foretelling its eventual manifestation on that day, with grave oaths and firm vows. On that day, they will not be left alone until the punishment befalls them, and they will have no means of escape.

The chapter then recalls the distress that will afflict them without any respite. This is then contrasted with the blessings that await the righteous on that day, who lived in fear for their families and called upon God as true believers in His oneness.

Finally, the chapter rebukes those who have rejected the truth for how they are treating the Prophet, the revelations of the Qur'an, and the true religion that he brought them. The chapter concludes with a repetition of this threat and warning and instructs the Prophet to glorify his Lord. The context and tone of the verses attest to their Meccan provenance.

وَٱلطُّورِ ١

(52:1) *By the Mount* (al–Ṭūr)

Some scholars have said that the term 'mount' (*ṭūr*) refers to any mountain, but that it is predominantly used to refer to Mount Sinai, where God spoke directly to Moses. They say it makes the most sense to understand *the Mount* here as referring to Moses because of the sanctity and significance He has bestowed upon it in such verses as: *by Mount Sinai* (95:2); *We called*

him from the right side of the Mount (19:52); And when He spoke to Moses, He said: *...so take off your sandals. You are indeed in the sacred valley of Tuwa* (20:12); *When he approached it, he was called from the right bank of the valley at the blessed spot from the tree...* (28:30).

Other have said that it can refer to any mountain, and here it is being used in this sense because of all the blessings with which God has endowed mountains, as per the verse: *He set in it firm mountains above it, and blessed it* (41:10).

وَكِتَابٍ مَسْطُورٍ ۝٢ فِي رَقٍّ مَنْشُورٍ ۝٣

(52:2–3) *by a Book inscribed, on an unrolled parchment* (fī raqq manshūr)

Some authorities have said that *raqq* refers to anything that it is written upon, while others have said it is from *waraq* ('leaf' as in a leaf of paper), and others still have said it is parchment. *Manshūr* is derived from *nashr*, which means to outspread or open up.

As for what book this refers to, some have said it refers to the preserved tablet, on which God wrote what was, what is, and what will be, and which is read by the angels of heaven. It is also said that it refers to the records of peoples' deeds, which are read by the record-keepers among the angels. Some say it is the Qur'an, inscribed by God on the Guarded Tablet, while others say it is the Torah, written on parchment and distributed for reading.

Based on the context of the verse, the latter most interpretation seems most correct.

وَالْبَيْتِ الْمَعْمُورِ ۝٤

(52:4) *by the House greatly frequented*

It is said that this refers to the Holy Kaaba, for it was the first house of worship set up for humankind and it has been a continuous site of pilgrimage since then until the present day, as God says: *Indeed the first house to be set up for mankind is the one at Bakkah, blessed and a guidance for all nations* (3:96).

There are also narrations which say that 'the House greatly frequented' (*al-bayt al-ma'mūr*) is actually a celestial structure located in the heavens above the Kaaba, to which the angels make their pilgrimage.

Note that the term *Book* in the previous verse is indefinite (*a Book*), this is to signify that it is a book so well known that it needs no introduction. Therefore, this is a form of grammatical indefiniteness that actually gives the

meaning of it being something definite.

وَالسَّقْفِ الْمَرْفُوعِ ﴿٥﴾

(52:5) ***by the vault raised high***

This refers to the heavens.

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وَالْبَحْرِ الْمَسْجُورِ ﴿٦﴾

(52:6) ***by the surging sea*** **(al–baḥr al–masjūr)**

Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī says that *sajr* (from which *masjūr* is derived) originally meant for a fire to blaze up. Meanwhile, in *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, al-Ṭabrisī says that *masjūr* means 'overflowing', as one says *sajarat al-tanūr* to mean that 'the oven is filled with fire.' The verse has been read with both meanings, although the first one is supported by the verse, *when the seas are set afire* (81:6), meaning that the seas are ablaze with flame. According to one tradition, the seas will be on fire on the Day of Judgement. Other commentators have said that it means the oceans will boil because of the fires within them.

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إِنَّ عَذَابَ رَبِّكَ لَوَاقِعٌ ﴿٧﴾ مَا لَهُ مِنْ دَافِعٍ ﴿٨﴾

(52:7–8) ***indeed your Lord's punishment will surely befall. There is none who can avert it.***

This is the object of the oaths given above. The punishment mentioned in this verse is the punishment that has been foretold for the Day of Judgement and with which God has threatened the disbelievers and deniers, as is indicated by the subsequent verse. When God says, *There is none who can avert it*, this shows that this is a fixed divine decree that cannot be prevented, as per the verse: *and the Hour is bound to come, there is no doubt in it, and Allah will resurrect those who are in the graves* (22:7).

The fact that this verse describes this punishment as belonging to *your* (sing.) *Lord* rather than as 'God's punishment' is meant to show the Prophet that he has God's support against those who reject his mission and to reassure him that his Lord will not forsake him on that day. See also the verse, *on the day when Allah will not let the Prophet down and the faithful who are with him* (66:8).

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يَوْمَ تَمُورُ السَّمَاءُ مَوْرًا ﴿٩﴾ وَتَسِيرُ الْجِبَالُ سَيْرًا ﴿١٠﴾

(52:9–10) *On the day when the sky whirls violently* (tamūr mawran)*, and the mountains move with an awful motion.*

According to al-Ṭabrisī in *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, the term '*mawr*' means for something to alternate between coming and going, just as smoke circulates and swirls before it vanishes. In a similar vein, Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī writes that '*mawr*' signifies rapid movement.

In any case, this is a reference to the celestial world being rolled up, as per the verses: *When the sky is rent apart, when the stars are scattered* (82:1–2); *The day We shall roll up the sky, like the rolling of the scrolls for writings* (21:104); *and the heavens, scrolled, in His right hand* (39:67).

Equally, when God says, *and the mountains move with an awful motion*, this refers to the quaking of the earth in the Final Hour, which God has also mentioned in numerous places throughout the Qur'an: *When the earth is shaken violently, and the mountains are shattered into bits and become scattered dust* (56:6); *and the mountains will be set moving and become a mirage* (78:20).

Examining Narrations

(1) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, about the verses, *By the Mount, by a Book inscribed* (52:1–2), we read: '*The Mount* is Mount Sinai.'

(2) In *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, about the verse, *by the House greatly frequented* (52:4), we read: 'This is a house in the fourth heaven situated above the Kaaba, to which the angels make pilgrimage in order to perform acts of worship. This is narrated from Ibn ʿAbbās and Mujāhid, it is also narrated from the Commander of the Faithful, who said: "Seventy thousand angels enter it each and every day and none of them will ever return to it again."'

Author's comments: The idea that *the House greatly frequented* refers to a celestial house of worship around which the angels circumambulate is found in a number of traditions from both Sunnī and Shīʿī sources. However, these differ in its precise location, with some placing it in the fourth heaven, others placing it in the first, and others still placing it in the seventh.

(3) In the same source, we read that, according to Imām ʿAlī, *by the vault raised high* (52:5) refers to the heavens. This is also the interpretation reported in *Tafsīr al-Qummī*. Also in this source, we read that *by the surging sea* (52:6) means that the seas will blaze with fire on the Day of Judgement.

(4) Meanwhile, al-Ṭabrisī reports from Qatāda in *Majmaʿ al-bayān* that

by the surging sea means that the seas will overflow. He also reports the opinion from Mujāhid, Ḍaḥḥāk, Akfash, and Ibn Zayd that they will be made to boil like a pot on a stove. Finally, he reports a tradition that the seas will be heated on the Day of Judgement until they boil, with each one boiling over the other until they explode in flames.

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Verses 11–28

These verses detail the punishment that is certain to befall them that day and describe their overall condition. As we have already mentioned, this is the central goal of the chapter. The condition of the righteous on that day is used for emphasis to reinforce the intended warning by providing a source of contrast.

فَوَيْلٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ لِلْمُكَذِّبِينَ ﴿١١﴾

(52:11) ***woe to the deniers on that day***

This sentence serves as a conclusion that is drawn from preceding verses which spoke about the unavoidable punishment of the Day of Judgement. In other words: When the matter is as described and there is no escape from the punishment, then woe to those who, despite its inevitability, still deny its existence and lie about it. This verse indicates that the ones who will be punished are the very same ones who deny the reality of the punishment because, even if it does not explicitly condemn them to hellfire, it invokes woe (*wayl*) upon them on that day, which implies that this is indeed their destiny.

Alternatively, it could be read as meaning that the punishment will inevitably come to pass and there is no doubt that it will only fall upon those who deny it, because they are the ones who disbelieve in God and deny the Day of Resurrection, so woe to them on that day. What shows that the punishment will befall the deniers is the earlier phrase, *<u>your</u> Lord's punishment* (52:7), because God's punishment will only fall upon those who the Prophet called toward Him but who did not answer the summons and denied his message.

الَّذِينَ هُمْ فِي خَوْضٍ يَلْعَبُونَ ﴿١٢﴾

(52:12) ***those who play around in vain talk*** **(khawḍ)**

Khawḍ ('vain talk', lit. 'delve') means to go into false speech, Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī says:

> '*Khawḍ* means to delve into a body of water and this term came to be used figuratively to mean entering into different matters, it is mostly used in the Qur'an for things that it is blameworthy to enter into.' The fact that *khawḍ* in this verse appears indefinite indicates that it

has an implicit adjective, namely *khawḍ ʿajīb* or 'strange vain talk.'

Moreover, insofar as occupying oneself with falsehoods will not lead anyone to a truthful outcome but rather only to false or fanciful ones adorned by delusions, the Qur'an describes them as 'playing', because playing is, by definition, an activity that only produces imaginary results.

Therefore, the meaning of the verse is: The deniers are those who persist in playing around in this strange vain talk by arguing about God's signs, denying them, and mocking them.

يَوْمَ يُدَعُّونَ إِلَىٰ نَارِ جَهَنَّمَ دَعًّا ﴿١٣﴾

(52:13) ***the day when they will be shoved toward the fire of hell forcibly***

The phrase, *the day when...* appears to be an exposition of *that day*, above (52:11).

هَٰذِهِ النَّارُ الَّتِي كُنتُمْ بِهَا تُكَذِّبُونَ ﴿١٤﴾

(52:14) ***'This is the Fire which you used to deny!'***

Meaning: 'They will be told: "*This is the Fire which you used to deny!*"'

When God says that they *used to deny* the Fire, He means that they denied the revelation that the Prophets conveyed to them from God about the existence of this Fire and about the fact that He would punish the guilty with it. In short, this verse means that this Fire is the confirmation of what the Prophets brought, which you had denied.

أَفَسِحْرٌ هَٰذَا أَمْ أَنتُمْ لَا تُبْصِرُونَ ﴿١٥﴾

(52:15) ***Is this then magic, or is it you who do not perceive?***

Here, God builds on the previous verse—*This is the Fire which you used to deny!*—by posing a rhetorical question intended as a rebuke. In it, He asks them, if this is the same Fire whose existence you rejected, then the miracles and revelation of the Prophets were not magic or trickery, as you claimed them to be either. This is not something imaginary or fictitious, as you impugned. On the contrary, it is something you can see clearly in front of you and experience directly. Therefore, this verse is in a similar vein to the verse elsewhere in the Qur'an, *The day when the faithless are exposed to the Fire, 'Is this not a fact?'* (46:34).

اصْلَوْهَا فَاصْبِرُوا أَوْ لَا تَصْبِرُوا سَوَاءٌ عَلَيْكُمْ ۖ إِنَّمَا تُجْزَوْنَ مَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٦﴾

(52:16) ***Enter it*** **(iṣlaw–hā)**, ***and whether you are patient or impatient it will be the same for you. You are only being requited for what you used to do.***

The root *salya* (from which the imperative *iṣlaw* is derived) literally means to be exposed to the heat of fire. Therefore, this commands them to submit themselves to the fires of hell.

... and whether you are patient or impatient: This follows from the command for them to enter Hellfire, and the use of equivocation here is to show that it makes no difference to the outcome whether they are patient or not. That is why God follows this phrase with *it will be the same for you*. In other words, you will inevitably suffer the heat of Hellfire and there can be no escape from it, whether you are patient and endure it or not. No amount of patience or endurance will free you from this punishment or reduce it for you, and neither will any amount of fright or impatience avail you in any way.

Therefore the phrase, *it will be the same for you*, is the predicate of an implicit subject, namely 'both (patience and impatience) are the same for you.'

You are only being requited for what you used to do: This explains the rationale for why their punishment is inevitable and why it will make no difference whether they try to endure it or not.

In short, this verse means: You are only due this evil recompense because you are being requited for the deeds you performed while you were alive. And, just as you cannot separate yourself from what you have done, you cannot be separated from the punishment for it. Alternatively, it could be read as meaning that you cannot escape the consequences of and recompense for your actions.

إِنَّ الْمُتَّقِينَ فِي جَنَّاتٍ وَنَعِيمٍ ﴿١٧﴾

(52:17) ***Indeed the Godwary will be amid gardens*** **(jannāt)** ***and bliss*** **(naʿīm)**

A *janna* ('garden', pl. *jannāt*, 'gardens') is an orchard shaded by trees, while *naʿīm* ('bliss') means an abundance of blessings. In short, those who possess the quality of Godwariness (*taqwā*) on that day will be lodged in gardens and surrounded by a multitude of blessings and enjoyments.

فَاكِهِينَ بِمَا آتَاهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ وَوَقَاهُمْ رَبُّهُمْ عَذَابَ الْجَحِيمِ ﴿١٨﴾

(52:18) ***rejoicing*** **(fākihīn)** ***because of what their Lord has given them, and that their Lord has saved them from the punishment of hell.***

The term *fākiha* (with which *fākihīn* shares a common root) refers to any kind of fruit. Some scholars have said that it refers to any kind of fruit except grapes or pomegranates. It is said that the verbs *tafakkah* and *fakiha* mean to pass fruits around or to receive fruits. This verse has been read variously in accordance with all of these meanings. So, some say that it means that they speak to one another about the blessings their Lord has bestowed upon them. Others say that it means that they will share the fruits given to them by their Lord with one another. Yet others say that it means they will enjoy the generosity of their Lord (in a similar vein to the first meaning). And other still say that it means that they will be amazed by the blessings their Lord has given them (perhaps in a similar vein to the second meaning).

The repetition of the phrase *their Lord* in this verse—the second time in the phrase, *their Lord has saved them from the punishment of hell*—is to show the great concern God has for the Godwary.

كُلُوا وَاشْرَبُوا هَنِيئًا بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ ﴿١٩﴾

(52:19) ***Enjoy your food and drink*** **(kulū wa–shrabū hanī'an)***, for what you used to do.*

They are told: 'Eat and drink with enjoyment' or 'Eat and drink enjoyable food and drink'—in this sentence, the Arabic word *hanī'an* can serve as either an absolute object (*maf'ūl muṭlaq*) or direct object (*maf'ūl bih*).

The phrase, *for what you used to do*, is either the object of the command *enjoy your food and drink* or of the word *hanī'an*. The variation produces a subtle difference in the meaning of the verse: In the first case, it would mean that the food and drink is the result of their deeds in this world, while in the latter case, it would mean that their enjoyment of it is the result of their deeds in this world.

مُتَّكِئِينَ عَلَىٰ سُرُرٍ مَصْفُوفَةٍ ۖ وَزَوَّجْنَاهُمْ بِحُورٍ عِينٍ ﴿٢٠﴾

(52:20) ***They will be reclining*** **(muttaki'īn)** ***on arrayed couches*** **(surur maṣfūfa)***, and We will wed them to big-eyed houris.*

The word *muttaki'īn* (reclining) is derived from *ittikā'*, which means to rest one's weight on a pillow or the like thereof.

Surur (couches) is the plural of *sarīr*, denoting 'a raised seat.'

Maṣfūfa (arrayed) means that they are laid out next to one another, side-by-side, in a line.

Therefore, the meaning of the verse is that they will be resting on cushions and pillows, sitting on elevated seats.

... and We will wed them to big-eyed houris: The meaning of 'wed' here is to pair them with houris, not to solemnise a marriage between them. This is illustrated by the phrasing of the Arabic—*wa zawwajnā-hum bi-ḥūr-i 'ayn*—where the verb 'wed' (*zawwajnā*) is given a second object using the preposition *bi*, as when the verb *zawwajnā* is used in the sense of marriage, it is already doubly transitive and, as such, does not require the preposition *bi* for it to take a second object. See for example, the verse, *We wedded her to you* (zawwajnā-ka-hā) (33:37), where if the preposition *bi* had been necessary for the verb to take a second object, the Arabic would have read *zawwajnā-ka bi-hā*.

وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا وَاتَّبَعَتْهُمْ ذُرِّيَّتُهُمْ بِإِيمَانٍ أَلْحَقْنَا بِهِمْ ذُرِّيَّتَهُمْ وَمَا أَلَتْنَاهُمْ
مِنْ عَمَلِهِمْ مِنْ شَيْءٍ ۚ كُلُّ امْرِئٍ بِمَا كَسَبَ رَهِينٌ ﴿٢١﴾

(52:21) ***And the faithful and their descendants who followed them* (ittabaʿathum)** ***in faith* (bi imānin)*—We will make their descendants join them* (alhaqnā bi–him)*, and We will not stint them* (mā alatnāhum)** ***anything from their deeds. Every man is a hostage to what he has earned.***

What is the difference between 'following' (*ittibā'*) and 'joining' (*luhūq*)? Some commentators have said that while both terms imply the sense of one party going ahead and another coming after, 'following' implies that the follower imitates the one they follow—such that they go wherever the latter goes, and they do whatever the latter does—whereas 'joining' does not suggest this, only that the two reach the same destination.

The verb *alatna*, derived from *lāt* and *alāt* (to stint) means 'to diminish.' Therefore, when God says, *We will not stint them...*, He means, 'We will not diminish anything from their deeds by causing them to join their forbears.'

It appears as though the verse is intended to enumerate God's blessings to the faithful. God tells the faithful that He will bless them by ensuring their descendants who follow them in faith will join them in paradise, as this is

supposed to gladden them and soothe their hearts. This shows that the noun *īmān* (faith) is indefinite here to signal the generality of this belief (i.e. 'any faith') rather than to aggrandize or magnify it. In other words, those who follow them with any kind of faith, even if that faith is of a lesser degree than that of their forbears, will join them in paradise. After all, it could hardly be counted a blessing if God caused their descendants to join them while those descendants had a faith that was equal to or stronger than the faith of their ancestors.

The fact that the phrase, *their descendants who followed them in faith*, is not qualified or restricted in any way shows that it is referring to people who are capable of belief in the sense that they have reached the age of moral responsibility. Therefore, the term *descendants* here refers to adult descendants who have a moral responsibility to believe; it does not encompass children who died while still minors. However, this does not contradict the legal doctrine that says the children of the faithful are assumed to be believers even while they are minors.

In this vein, however, is another possible reading that can be derived from the indefiniteness of the word *īmān*, namely that *their descendants who followed them in faith* includes those who chose to believe as adults and those who followed the faith of their parents while still children. In this case, the blessing God is granting to the faithful is that their children who die before reaching maturity will still be admitted to paradise with them. In this case, the pronouns 'them/their' (*hum*) in *We will not stint them anything from their deeds* refers back to *the faithful*, just like they do in the phrases *their descendants who followed them in faith*. In this case, the statement, *We will not stint them anything from their deeds*, is intended to remove any suggestion that God will diminish the rewards of the faithful in order for their children to join them in paradise, because this would run counter to the spirit of divine generosity being expressed in the verse. Moreover, it is obvious that it would be ungenerous to diminish the rewards of the parents rather than the rewards of the minors (who, because of their age, have not had the opportunity to earn divine rewards).

From this, it is evident that the verse, *the faithful and their descendants who followed them…* represents the beginning of a new discourse, distinct from the one immediately before it, in which God expounds His generosity and blessings towards those who have faith: He says that He will ensure that their children join them in paradise so long as they follow them with any kind of faith, even if that faith is weaker or less intense than that of their parents. He says this to gladden and reassure the parents. Moreover, He promises not to

diminish the rewards of the parents in order for their children to join them. On the contrary, He will give the children the same as He gives the parents or, at the very least, a sufficient amount of reward that there is no discrepancy between them.

There are some ill-informed readings of this verse. For example, that the term *the faithful* in this verse is actually the object of the verb *wed* in the previous verse, so that the meaning becomes: 'We will wed them to big-eyed houris and the faithful...' meaning that they will be married to the houris and joined to the faithful in companionship and camaraderie.

Another such reading is that *descendants* only refers to children who are still minors when they die. Yet another is that the pronouns 'them/their' (*hum*) in *and We will not stint them anything from their deeds* refers to the *descendants*. In this case, the meaning would be: 'And we did not diminish the rewards of the descendants in the slightest by causing them to join their parents. On the contrary, we will give them their full recompense—for good or bad—then cause them to join their parents.'

Every man is a hostage* (rahīn) *to what he has earned: Based on the context, this offers a rationale for the statement, *and We will not stint them anything from their deeds*. The term *rahīn* is derived from *rahn*, which, according to al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, refers to a security or collateral that is given in exchange for a loan. He writes: 'Insofar as a *rahn* is held as a security for a loan, the term came to be used to denote anything that is kept as a security or guarantee, no matter what it is.'

Perhaps this figurative meaning is what is intended by the verse, as if to say that the person is a piece of collateral that God holds as a security for his deeds, whether good or evil, until He can repay him in full for what he has done in this world, whether in the form of reward or punishment. Therefore, if God diminishes anything from his deeds and does not deliver his recompense in full, he would not truly be a hostage to what he has earned but merely a hostage to some of what he has earned, in which case someone else might be given the remainder of it, like his descendants who God causes to join him. Therefore, by saying, *every man is a hostage to what he has earned*, God is emphasizing that no one's deeds (or the recompense thereof) will be given to anyone else.

But what about the verse, *Every soul is hostage to what it has earned, except the People of the Right Hand* (74:38–39)? This is referring to them being a hostage to punishment on the Day of Judgement, as is clear from the context in which it appears, as in the following we read: *They will be in gardens, questioning concerning the guilty* (74:41–42).

Some have suggested that the meaning of the present verse is that every

man is a hostage to his evil deeds—as suggested by the aforementioned verse from Sūrah al-Muddaththir)—save for the People of the Right Hand. According to this reading, the phrase, *every man is a hostage to what he has earned*, is an aside referring to the inmates of hellfire in the middle of a passage describing the inhabitants of paradise.

Al-Zamakhsharī has resolved this apparent conflict between the two verses by adopting a figurative reading. He writes: 'A servant's soul is held hostage by God in exchange for the righteous deeds He wishes him to perform, in the same way that a man might hold his slave hostage for some work He has asked him to do. If he completes the task, He releases him, otherwise, He will punish them.'

However, it will be evident to the reader that this does not suffice to explain the connection between the phrase, *every man is a hostage to what he has earned*, and the rest of the verse in which it occurs.

وَأَمْدَدْنَاهُمْ بِفَاكِهَةٍ وَلَحْمٍ مِمَّا يَشْتَهُونَ ﴿٢٢﴾

(52:22) ***We will provide them*** **(amdadnā–hum)** ***with fruits and meat, such as they desire***

This verse provides further details about some of the blessings and enjoyments they will receive in paradise, which were alluded to in the earlier verse, *Enjoy your food and drink, for what you used to do* (52:19).

The verb *amdadnā-hum* (We will provide them) is derived from *imdād*, which means to bring something to someone time and again, and it is only used for good things, in the same way as the verb *madd* is only used for evil ones, as per the verse, *and We will prolong* (wa numuddu) *his punishment endlessly* (19:79).

Therefore, the meaning of this verse is: We will provide them with fruits and whatever meats they desire as many times as they desire and on as many occasions as they desire, without ever ceasing.

يَتَنَازَعُونَ فِيهَا كَأْسًا لَا لَغْوٌ فِيهَا وَلَا تَأْثِيمٌ ﴿٢٣﴾

(52:23) ***There they will pass from hand to hand*** **(yatanāzaʿūn)** ***a cup*** **(kaʾs)** ***wherein there will be neither any vanity*** **(laghw)** ***nor sinfulness*** **(taʾthīm).**

The verb *yatanāzaʿūn* means to gather together and pass something around, while a *kaʾs* here refers to a large drinking bowl. The term *kaʾs* in

classical Arabic is only ever used to refer to something that contains wine.

The meaning of *laghw* (vanity) here is the vain speech that comes out of the mouths of wine drinkers in this world, while *ta'thīm* (sinfulness) refers to the sinful behavior they indulge in under the influence of alcohol. The negation of vanity and sinfulness in this verse shows that the cup being referred to in this verse is indeed a wine cup. However, the wine of the hereafter does not produce the same effects as the wine of this world.

وَيَطُوفُ عَلَيْهِمْ غِلْمَانٌ لَهُمْ كَأَنَّهُمْ لُؤْلُؤٌ مَكْنُونٌ ﴿٢٤﴾

(52:24) ***They will be waited upon by youths of theirs*** **(yaṭūf ʿalayhim ghilmānin lahum),** ***as if they were guarded pearls***

Note here that the verb *yaṭūf* (lit. 'to circuit, circumambulate') is used here to mean coming and going in service.

Some have said that the phrase *ghilmānin lahum* (youths of theirs) is kept indefinite here lest one might imagine that these *ghilmān* were the servants that they had in this world, whereas, in fact, like the houris, these youths are creatures of Paradise. They are akin to *guarded pearls* because of their beauty, grace, and purity.

وَأَقْبَلَ بَعْضُهُمْ عَلَىٰ بَعْضٍ يَتَسَاءَلُونَ ﴿٢٥﴾

(52:25) ***They will turn to one another, questioning each other.***

In other words, each of them will ask the others about their condition in this world and what led them to attain the blessings of paradise.

قَالُوا إِنَّا كُنَّا قَبْلُ فِي أَهْلِنَا مُشْفِقِينَ ﴿٢٦﴾

(52:26) ***They will say, 'Indeed, aforetime, we used to be apprehensive about our families*** **(fī ahlinā mushfiqīn)...'**

Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī says that *ishfāq* (apprehension) refers to concern mixed with fear, for the one who is apprehensive loves the thing about which he is apprehensive and fears that harm might come to it, as God says, *and who are apprehensive of the Hour* (21:49). In the present verse, the verb is made transitive using the preposition *fī*, and when this is the case it emphasizes the meaning of fearfulness.

Therefore, the meaning of the verse is: In this world, we were apprehensive for our families, we cared for their happiness and saving them from error

and perdition, so we lived with them gracefully, advised them abundantly, and called them to the truth.

فَمَنَّ اللَّهُ عَلَيْنَا وَوَقَانَا عَذَابَ السَّمُومِ ﴿٢٧﴾

(52:27) *'... But Allah showed us favor* (mann Allah ʿalaynā) *and He saved us from the punishment of the miasma* (al–samūm)...'

According to al-Rāghib, *mann* (to show favor) means to pour out blessings on someone, which is a good thing, or to enumerate one's favors to someone, which is a detestable action from anyone besides God. For example, see the verse, *They count it as a favor to you* (yamannūn ʿalayk) *that they have embraced Islam. Say, 'Do not count it as a favor to me* (lā tamunnū ʿalayya) *your embracing of Islam. Rather it is Allah who has done you a favor* (Allah yamunnu ʿalaykum) *in that He has guided you to faith, should you be truthful* (49:17).

God showed favor to the inhabitants of paradise by granting them felicity through enveloping them in His mercy and protecting them from the punishment of the miasma.

According to al-Ṭabrisī, *al-samūm* refers to a heat that penetrates the pores of the body and causes it pain, hence why a hot wind is referred to as *rīh al-samūm*.

إِنَّا كُنَّا مِنْ قَبْلُ نَدْعُوهُ ۖ إِنَّهُ هُوَ الْبَرُّ الرَّحِيمُ ﴿٢٨﴾

(52:28) *'...indeed we used to supplicate Him aforetime. Indeed He is the All-benign, the All-merciful.'*

This explains why God showed them the favor mentioned in the previous verse, and the coda, *Indeed He is the All-benign, the All-merciful* explains why they used to supplicate Him.

Taken along with the two previous verses, the present verse shows that these inhabitants of paradise would supplicate to God in this world by worshipping Him through His oneness and submitting to His commands, and that they showed care and concern for their families by drawing them near to the truth and keeping them away from falsehood. This was the reason for the great favor that God showed to them in paradise and why God protected them from the punishment of the miasma. Of course, the ultimate reason for all of that is that God is the All-benign (*al-Birr*) and the All-merciful (*al-Raḥīm*), and so He treats those who invoke Him with kindness and shows them mercy.

Therefore, these three verses can be read in the same vein as the two latter

most verses of Sūrah al-ʿAṣr: *Indeed man is in loss, except those who have faith and do righteous deeds, and enjoin one another to the truth, and enjoin one another to patience* (103:2–3).

The All-benign (*al-Birr*) is one of God's Most Beautiful Names. It is derived from *birr*, in the sense of to treat kindly. Some scholars have said it is similar in meaning to 'the Gracious' (*al-Laṭīf*).

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Examining Narrations

(1) In *al-Kāfī*, al-Kulaynī narrates via his chain of narrators from Abū Bakr, from Imām al-Ṣādiq, about the verse, *And the faithful and their descendants who followed them in faith—We will make their descendants join them* (52:21): 'The children fall short from the achievements of their parents, so God ensures that the children join their parents that the hearts of the latter might be gladdened.'

Author's comments: The same tradition is also narrated by al-Ṣadūq in *Kitāb al-tawḥīd* via his chain of narrators from Abū Bakr al-Ḥaḍramī, from Imām al-Ṣādiq.

(2) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī* it is narrated from Sulaymān al-Daylamī, from Abū Baṣīr, from Imām al-Ṣādiq: 'Surely the (deceased) children of our faithful followers (*shīʿatunā min al-muʾminīn*) will be cared for by Fāṭima. God says, *We will make their descendants join them*, meaning that they will be returned to their parents on the Day of Judgment.'

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Author's comments: This is also narrated by al-Ṭabrisī in *Majmaʿ al-bayān* as part of a tradition from Imām al-Ṣādiq with an incomplete chain of narrators.

(3) In *Kitāb al-tawḥīd*, al-Ṣadūq narrates via a chain of narrators from Abū Baṣīr that Imām al-Ṣādiq said: 'When a child of the faithful dies, a caller cries out from the depths of the heavens and the earth, "Lo! Surely so-and-so child of so-and-so has died!" If one or both of their parents have already died, or if some of their faithful family members have died, they will be taken to join them and be raised by them. Otherwise, they will be raised by Fāṭima until one or both of their parents or some believing members of their family pass away, whereat they will be returned to them.'

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(4) In *Man lā yaḥḍuruh al-faqīh*, al-Ṣadūq narrates from al-Ḥasan b. Maḥbūb, from ʿAlī, from al-Ḥalabī, from Abū ʿAbd Allāh: 'Surely God Almighty entrusts Abraham and Sarah with raising the deceased

children of the faithful beneath a tree in paradise. This tree has teats like those of a cow and is in the middle of a palace made out of pearl. On the Day of Judgement the children are dressed and groomed and returned their parents, and they will be sovereigns in paradise with their parents. This is the meaning of the verse, *And the faithful and their descendants who followed them in faith—We will make their descendants join them*.'

(5) In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān,* Zādhān narrates from ʿAlī, who narrates that the Messenger of God, said, 'Surely the faithful and their children will be in paradise.' Then he recited this verse.

(6) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, al-Bazzār and Ibn Mardawayh narrate from Ibn ʿAbbās with an incomplete chain of narrators from the Prophet: 'Surely God will elevate the descendants of a believer to his level in paradise if their deeds are lower than his.' Then he recited the verse *And the faithful and their descendants who followed them in faith—We will make their descendants join them, and We will not stint them anything from their deeds.*'

(7) In the same source, al-Ṭabarānī and Ibn Mardawayh narrate from Ibn ʿAbbā that the Prophet said: 'When a man enters Paradise, he will ask about his parents, his descendants, and his children. He will be told, "They did not reach your level or the extent of your deeds." He will say, "O my Lord! I strived for myself and for them!" So God will decree that they be brought to him.' Then Ibn ʿAbbās recited the verse, *And the faithful and their descendants who followed them in faith...*

Author's comments: The verse does not make any explicit reference to the parents mentioned in the tradition. However, it is still an appropriate meaning on account of the supplication of the angels, *Our Lord! Admit them into the Gardens of Eden, which You have promised them, along with whoever is righteous among their forebears, their spouses and their descendants. Indeed You are the All-mighty, the All-wise* (40:8).

(8) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, about the verse, *wherein there will be neither any vanity nor sinfulness* (52:23), we read: 'In Paradise there will be neither any singing nor indecency; the believer will drink wine without sinning.) *They will turn to one another, questioning each other*—he said, "in paradise."'

Verses 29–44

Having warned of the punishment that will afflict the deniers on the Day of Resurrection and given glad tidings that the Godwary will be joyful in gardens of bliss, God bids His Prophet to continue preaching and admonishing his people. He also emphasizes that he has the qualities necessary to call people to the truth and that the deniers have no excuse for their denials and rejections of the Prophetic call.

This set of verses negates each and every objection the deniers could possibly conceive of to the Prophet's mission. There are sixteen of these in total. Some of them pertain to the person of the Prophet, and if just one of them had been true, it would have meant that he was not worthy of being followed and that people should not have paid heed to him. For example, if he had been a soothsayer, a madman, a poet, a charlatan who invented lies about God, or someone who sought financial rewards from the people for his preaching, then he would not have been someone worthy of being followed by others. Some of these objections pertain to the deniers themselves, such as their having been created from nothing, or their being creators themselves, or that their intellects prompted them to reject his message, or the like thereof. Note that these verses reprimand them harshly for their denials.

فَذَكِّرْ فَمَا أَنْتَ بِنِعْمَتِ رَبِّكَ بِكَاهِنٍ وَلَا مَجْنُونٍ ﴿٢٩﴾

(52:29) ***So admonish. By your Lord's blessing, you are not a soothsayer, nor mad.***

This is the conclusion that follows logically from the punishment that the previous verses foretold would befall the deniers on the Day of Resurrection and from which the Godwary would be protected, as they would be in gardens of bliss.

Therefore, the meaning of the verse is: 'With the above in mind, admonish! For you only warn and admonish people with the truth. You are not, as they claim, a soothsayer or a madman.'

Note that the negation, *you are not a soothsayer, nor mad* is qualified by the phrase, *By your Lord's blessing*. In this way, God highlights the special favor He has bestowed upon His Prophet. However, the blessing is not that the prophet

is neither a soothsayer or a madman—after all, the overwhelming majority of people are neither of these! On the contrary, it is because the Prophet has been endowed with so many blessings by God that it is inconceivable that attributes such as soothsaying or madness could be rightly ascribed to him.

أَمْ يَقُولُونَ شَاعِرٌ نَّتَرَبَّصُ بِهِ رَيْبَ الْمَنُونِ ﴿٣٠﴾

(52:30) ***Do they say, 'A poet, for whom we await*** **(natarabbaṣ)** ***a fatal accident*** **(rayb al-manūn)***'?*

The verb *tarabbaṣ* means 'to anticipate.' In *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, we read: '*Tarabbaṣ* means to anticipate some kind of reversal of fortune.'

Manūn means death or fate, while *rayb* here signifies anxiety or confusion. Therefore *rayb al-manūn* means an anxiety about death.

In short, the verse means: 'Instead, they say, "he..."—meaning the Prophet—'...is but a poet who we anticipate will soon be overtaken by death, and people will soon forget about him and his message, then we can be at ease."'

قُلْ تَرَبَّصُوا فَإِنِّي مَعَكُم مِّنَ الْمُتَرَبِّصِينَ ﴿٣١﴾

(52:31) ***Say, 'Wait! I too am waiting along with you.'***

God tells the Prophet to bid them to wait, as they have already indicated they are pleased to do. This imperative is, of course, meant as a threat, meaning: 'Wait as you see fit, for there truly is something that will come to pass that is worth waiting for. I too am waiting to witness it, but it will against you rather than for you, for it is your ruin and everlasting punishment!'

أَمْ تَأْمُرُهُمْ أَحْلَامُهُم بِهَٰذَا ۚ أَمْ هُمْ قَوْمٌ طَاغُونَ ﴿٣٢﴾

(52:32) ***Is it their intellect*** **(aḥlām)** ***which prompts them to this, or are they a rebellious lot?***

Aḥlām is the plural of *ḥilm*, meaning intellect. The demonstrative pronoun, '*this*' refers to the things they are saying to the Prophet and what they are expecting to befall him.

The meaning is as follows: Rather, is it their intellect that prompts them to utter these words and expect him to perish? What kind of intellect is it that responds to the truth with these kinds of falsehoods?

... or are they a rebellious lot? In other words, it is not their intellects that

prompt them to this, rather it is their rebelliousness that does so.

أَمْ يَقُولُونَ تَقَوَّلَهُ ۚ بَلْ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ ﴿٣٣﴾

(52:33) ***Do they say, 'He has improvised it*** **(taqawwala–hu)***'? Rather they have no faith!*

In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, al-Ṭabrisī writes that *taqawwal* means 'to be tortuous in speech' and that this is only used for false speech. Therefore, the meaning of the verse is: 'Rather they say, "He has fabricated the Qur'an and attributed it to God falsely." No, rather they have no faith so they level these false accusations at him.'

فَلْيَأْتُوا بِحَدِيثٍ مِثْلِهِ إِنْ كَانُوا صَادِقِينَ ﴿٣٤﴾

(52:34) ***Let them bring a discourse like it, if they are truthful***

This is a response to the claim made by the deniers in the previous verse, *He has improvised it*. In other words, if the words uttered by the Prophet were the words of a human being, like any other kind of speech, then they would resemble other kinds of speech, and it would have been possible for the deniers to produce a discourse similar to it. Therefore, if they are truthful when they claim that he was the author of the Qur'an, they should be able to produce a similar discourse. However, it is, in fact, divine speech, as is evident from its miraculous inimitability, which means that no human being can produce anything equal to it. We have already discussed the different aspects of the Qur'an's miraculous inimitability in our commentary on Sūrah al-Baqarah, verse 23.

This verse can be read as a refutation of all of the accusations of the deniers quoted above, such as that the Prophet was a soothsayer, a madman, a poet, or a fabricator, because no other person has been able to produce the likeness of it. Therefore, the only possible conclusion is that the Qur'an is the speech of God. However, the reading closest to the apparent one is the one laid out above.

أَمْ خُلِقُوا مِنْ غَيْرِ شَيْءٍ أَمْ هُمُ الْخَالِقُونَ ﴿٣٥﴾

(52:35) ***Were they created from something else*** **(min ghayri shay'in)***? Or are they creators?*

The word *shay'* is indefinite to imply the existence of an adjective, with the meaning: 'created from something other than what the rest of humankind were created from.'

Therefore, the meaning of the verse is as follows: 'Or were those deniers created from something different from the rest of humankind, such that while divine messengers were sent with revelation to everyone else in order to call them to the truth and invite them to don the mantle of divine servanthood, these deniers have no moral duties, nor are subject to any divine commands and prohibitions, and their deeds will neither be rewarded or punishment, because they were created from a substance different to the rest of humankind.'

However, there are other interpretations of this verse as well.

Some commentators say that it means: 'Were they created and fashioned in this wondrous form without any creator or maker, so they have no need of any deity to look after their affairs?'

Others say it means: 'Or are they made out of something non-living such that they cannot be given commands or prohibitions, like inanimate objects?'

Still others say it means: 'Or are they created without reason, or not for the purpose of reward and punishment, and that is why they do not listen?'

Some also say it means: 'Or were they created in vain, so that they will not be held to account or given commands or prohibitions?'

However, the interpretation we have provided is both the closest in meaning to the text and the most comprehensive.

Or are they creators? Did they create themselves, so that they were not created by God, and, therefore, they do not need Him to nurture them or look after their affairs by sending commands and prohibitions.

أَمْ خَلَقُوا السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ ۚ بَل لَّا يُوقِنُونَ ﴿٣٦﴾

(52:36) ***Did they create the heavens and the earth? Rather they have no certainty!***

Or did they create the cosmos, such that they are gods and lords in their own right and, therefore, too magnificent to serve another being or obey their commands. No, on the contrary, they are a people without certainty.

أَمْ عِندَهُمْ خَزَائِنُ رَبِّكَ أَمْ هُمُ الْمُصَيْطِرُونَ ﴿٣٧﴾

(52:37) ***Do they possess the treasuries of your Lord? Or are they the controllers?***

Meaning: 'Do they own the treasuries of your Lord such that they can grant prophethood to whomever they wish and deny it to whomever they wish and, thereby, deny your being a prophet and a divine messenger?' *Or*

are they the controllers (al-muṣayṭirūn)*?*

The word *muṣayṭirūn* is derived from *sayṭara*, meaning power and dominion. Therefore, the meaning of the verse is: 'Or are they the ones with power and dominion over God, such that they can take back from you the prophethood and divine messengership that God has granted you?'

أَمْ لَهُمْ سُلَّمٌ يَسْتَمِعُونَ فِيهِ ۖ فَلْيَأْتِ مُسْتَمِعُهُمْ بِسُلْطَانٍ مُبِينٍ ﴿٣٨﴾

(52:38) ***Do they have a ladder*** **(sullam)** ***whereby they eavesdrop*** **(yastamiʿūn)*****? If so let their eavesdropper produce a manifest authority*** **(sulṭān).**

A *sullam* is a ladder with steps that one can use to reach high places. *Yastamiʿūn* (eavesdrop) suggests the meaning of ascending. *Sulṭān* is a decisive proof or argument.

Therefore, the meaning of this verse is: 'Do they have a ladder by which they can ascend to the heavens and hear revelations, so that they can take whatever is revealed to them and reject everything else? If so, then let the one who has been listening—the one who has claimed to hear them—provide clear proof of this.

أَمْ لَهُ الْبَنَاتُ وَلَكُمُ الْبَنُونَ ﴿٣٩﴾

(52:39) ***Does He have daughters while you have sons?***

Some have said this mocks their foolishness for ascribing to God what they would deny to themselves.

أَمْ تَسْأَلُهُمْ أَجْرًا فَهُمْ مِنْ مَغْرَمٍ مُثْقَلُونَ ﴿٤٠﴾

(52:40) ***Do you ask them for a reward, so that they are weighed down with debt*** **(maghram muthaqalūn)*****?***

According to al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *ghurm* (from which *maghram* is derived) signifies when a person's property is afflicted by misfortune, though not through criminal activity or by betrayal. *Muthaqlūn* denotes those who have had a burden placed on their backs, and it is a metaphor for being burdened by difficulties.

Therefore, the meaning is: 'Or do you demand monetary rewards from them in return for conveying your message, such that they are distressed by the debts they have incurred by paying this?'

أَمْ عِنْدَهُمُ الْغَيْبُ فَهُمْ يَكْتُبُونَ ﴿٤١﴾

(52:41) ***Do they have the Unseen, which they write down?***

Some commentators have said that the meaning of *the Unseen* here is the Guarded Tablet (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ*) upon which is written knowledge of the unseen. According to this view, the meaning of the verse is: 'Or do they have access to the Guarded Tablet, from which they transcribe knowledge of the unseen and convey it to people, so that the things they have told people about you are true beyond all doubt?'

Others have said that *the Unseen* refers to knowledge of the Unseen in general, and that writing means to record it. According to this reading, the meaning of the verse becomes: 'Or do they have knowledge of the Unseen, which they record as a code for others to obey.' Still others have suggested that 'to write' here means 'to pass judgement.'

أَمْ يُرِيدُونَ كَيْدًا ۖ فَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا هُمُ الْمَكِيدُونَ ﴿٤٢﴾

(52:42) ***Do they seek to outmaneuver*** **(kayd)*****? But it is the faithless who are the outmaneuvered ones!***

According to al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *kayd* refers to a kind of stratagem or ruse. In *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, al-Ṭabrisī says that *kayd* means 'to scheme or plot' and that others have said that it signifies an action done in secret that would anger another person if it came to light.

Based on the context, it appears that the word *outmaneuver* refers to their plotting against the Prophet by denouncing him as a soothsayer, a madman, a poet, or a fabricator in order to turn the people away from him and dissuade them from following him. In doing so, they hoped to thwart his mission and extinguish his light. Even though they are trying to outmaneuver the Prophet, they are, in fact, only plotting against their own souls, in that they will deprive themselves of eternal happiness and deny themselves the opportunity to follow the path of truth. In fact, it is God who outmaneuvers them by denying them the blessing of divine success and placing a seal upon their hearts.

Other commentators have argued that the meaning of *outmaneuver* is a specific reference to the decision made by the notables of the Quraysh in Dār al-Nadwa to assassinate the Prophet shortly before the Emigration—based on this, *the faithless* mentioned in this verse are the notables who participated in this meeting. However, God turned their own schemes against them, and they

were slain in the Battle of Badr. If this is indeed the meaning of this verse, then it contains a prophecy about the future, because it was revealed a long time before these events. However, this interpretation does not match the context and tone of this section of verses.

أَمْ لَهُمْ إِلَٰهٌ غَيْرُ اللَّهِ ۚ سُبْحَانَ اللَّهِ عَمَّا يُشْرِكُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾

(52:43) ***Do they have any god other than Allah? Clear is Allah of any partners that they may ascribe!***

If they had a god other than *Allah* who had created them and who looked after their affairs, then they would have no need of *Allah* and could reject the call of His Messenger; their god could come to their assistance and keep them safe from the punishment with which *Allah* had threatened the deniers and of which the Prophet had warned them.

Clear is Allah of any partners that they may ascribe! This declares God exalted above any partner they might ascribe to Him.

وَإِنْ يَرَوْا كِسْفًا مِنَ السَّمَاءِ سَاقِطًا يَقُولُوا سَحَابٌ مَرْكُومٌ ﴿٤٤﴾

(52:44) ***Were they to see a fragment*** **(kisf)** ***falling from the sky, they would say, 'A cumulous cloud*** **(saḥāb markūm).'**

A *kisf* is a piece of something, while *markūm* is an adjective meaning 'to be piled atop one another.'

The meaning of this verse is: 'Their obstinate denial and disbelief towards the true message is so deeply rooted that even if they saw a piece of the sky falling upon their own heads, they would dismiss it as a cumulous cloud and refuse to recognise it as a sign of divine punishment.' This is in a similar vein to the verse, *Were We to open for them a gate of the sky, so that they could go on ascending through it, they would surely say, 'Indeed a spell has been cast on our eyes; rather we are a bewitched lot'* (15:14–15).

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Verses 45–49

These verses draw the chapter to a close and bid the Prophet to leave the deniers to their own devices and not to concern himself with them, and to patiently submit to the judgement of his Lord and glorify His praise. In the course of these verses, God repeats the warnings of inevitable punishment He delivered to them at the beginning of the chapter, adding to this the warning of another punishment for *those who do wrong*.

فَذَرْهُمْ حَتَّىٰ يُلَاقُوا يَوْمَهُمُ الَّذِي فِيهِ يُصْعَقُونَ ﴿٤٥﴾

(52:45) *So leave them* (dhar–hum) *until they encounter their day on which they will be thunderstruck* (yuṣʿaqūn).

Dhar-hum is a command to forsake them or let them alone, and this verb is only used in the imperative or future tense. *Yaṣʿaqūn* is derived from *iṣʿāq*, meaning 'to cause to die.'

Having warned those who deny the Prophet's message of an imminent punishment about which there can be no doubt, God refuted all of their excuses for rejecting his mission (or all of the hypothetical excuses they could raise to reject it). Now, He says that they are obstinately persisting in falsehood to the extent that even if they saw the clearest and most obvious sign of the truth, they would explain it away and reject it. Based on this, He commands His Prophet to forsake them and leave them to their own devices. However, this is, in fact, a subtle warning that they will be engulfed by divine punishment, and this was indeed the case.

The meaning of *their day on which they will be thunderstruck* is the day on which the Trumpet will be sounded, causing all of the denizens of the heavens and the earth to pass away, and it is one of the signs of the End Times. God says, *And the Trumpet will be blown, and whoever is in the heavens will swoon and whoever is on the earth* (39:68).

This interpretation of the phrase is supported by the subsequent verse, which reads, *the day when their guile will not avail them in any way, nor will they be helped* (52:46). After all, saying that guile will be of no use and that there will be no help for them are descriptions that are particular to the Day of Resurrection, the day on which all means will be exhausted and the command

will belong solely to God.

Now, one could object that when the Trumpet is sounded only living creatures will pass away, and these deniers will not be alive by that point. The response to this objection is that not only will everyone who is alive in this world die, but everyone in the Purgatory (*Barzakh*) will die as well, and if these deniers are no longer living in this world, they will exist in *Barzakh*.

It is also possible that the pronoun '*they*' in *they will be thunderstruck* refers to those who are alive on that day, but that the threat is not the threat of the Trumpet being sounded but rather of the punishment that will befall the deniers on the day it is sounded.

Some commentators have said that *their day on which they will be thunderstruck* is a reference to the Battle of Badr, but this is an unlikely reading. Others have said it refers to the day on which they die, but this does not match the overall context of the verse or the warning found at the beginning of the chapter, which threatens the deniers with the punishment that awaits them on the Day of Judgement, not the punishment on the day they die.

يَوْمَ لَا يُغْنِي عَنْهُمْ كَيْدُهُمْ شَيْئًا وَلَا هُمْ يُنْصَرُونَ ﴿٤٦﴾ وَإِنَّ لِلَّذِينَ ظَلَمُوا
عَذَابًا دُونَ ذَٰلِكَ وَلَٰكِنَّ أَكْثَرَهُمْ لَا يَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٤٧﴾

(52:46–47) ***the day when their guile will not avail them in any way, nor will they be helped. And indeed for those who do wrong, there is a punishment besides that, but most of them do not know***

It is not unlikely that this is a reference to the punishment of the grave (*'adhāb al-qabr*). The phrase*, but most of them do not know*, hints that there are some of them who know of this punishment but still persist in their denial and disbelief out of sheer obstinacy. Some scholars have said that this is a reference to the Battle of Badr, but the ending of the verse does not accord with such a reading.

وَاصْبِرْ لِحُكْمِ رَبِّكَ فَإِنَّكَ بِأَعْيُنِنَا ۖ وَسَبِّحْ بِحَمْدِ رَبِّكَ حِينَ تَقُومُ ﴿٤٨﴾

(52:48) ***So submit patiently to the judgement of your Lord, for indeed you fare before Our eyes. And celebrate the praise of your Lord when you rise,***

The command, *So submit patiently* at the beginning of this verse follows on from *So leave them…* (52:45) and, based on the context, it appears that *the*

judgement of your Lord refers to His decision to grant the deniers a temporary respite and to seal their heart, and His command to the Prophet to continue calling to the truth for the sake of God in spite of the persecution and hardships he faced. Therefore, the meaning of the phrase, *indeed you fare before Our eyes* is that 'We see you, and nothing of your condition is hidden from us. We have not forgotten you.' Therefore, by giving this as the rationale for the command to *submit patiently*, it emphasizes the importance of the Prophet being patient and intensifying his preaching.

Some have said that *indeed you fare before Our eyes* means that 'You are under our guard and our protection', for 'eye' (*'ayn*) can be used figuratively in the sense of guarding. However, the meaning we have given above appears more appropriate to the context of the verse.

And celebrate the praise of your Lord when you rise: What does *when you rise* refer to? Some have said it means 'when you rise from sleep', others have said it means 'when you rise from a nap'—a reference to the noon prayer (*ṣalāt al-ẓuhr*)—and others still have said it means 'when you rise from a gathering.' Then there are those who say it means any kind of rising. Some have said it means rising to perform obligatory prayers, while other have said it means rising to perform any prayer. Yet other have said it refers to the two units of prayer performed before the obligatory morning prayers. These are the seven opinions reported by al-Ṭabrisī.

وَمِنَ اللَّيْلِ فَسَبِّحْهُ وَإِدْبَارَ النُّجُومِ ﴿٤٩﴾

(52:49) ***and also glorify Him during the night and at the receding of the stars***

In other words, glorify Him and declare Him transcendent while also praising Him.

and also glorify Him during the night: This is a reference to night prayers, although some have said it refers to the prayers of sunset (*ṣalāt al-maghrib*) and evening (*ṣalāt al-'ishā'*).

... and at the receding of the stars: Some have said that the receding of the stars is when they vanish at daybreak, which would make this a reference to the two units of prayer offered before the obligatory morning prayer. Other have said it is a reference to the morning prayer itself, while still others have said it refers to glorifying God in the morning and the evening, meaning to remember Him and be mindful of Him constantly.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, we read: '*and celebrate the praise of your Lord when you rise* (52:48) for night prayers (*ṣalāt al-layl*), *and also glorify Him* (52:49) in night prayers.'

Author's comments: The same meaning is reported in *Majmaʿ al-bayān* from Zurāra, Ḥumrān, and Muḥammad b. Muslim from Imām al-Bāqir and Imām al-Ṣādiq.

(2) In the same source, via a chain of narrators going back to Imām al-Riḍā: 'Following prostrations (*adbār al-sujūd*) refers to four units of prayer after Maghrib, while *the receding of the stars* refers to two units of prayer before morning prayers.'

Author's comments: The latter part of this tradition is narrated in *Majmaʿ al-bayān* from Imām al-Bāqir and Imām al-Ṣādiq and in *Tafsīr al-Qummī* via a chain of narrators going back to Imām al-Ṣādiq.

And Sunnī sources narrate a number of traditions to the effect that whenever the Prophet rose from sitting, he would glorify God and celebrate His praise, saying: 'It is the expiation of breaking up a gathering.' However, this is not self-evidently an explanation of the meaning of the present verse.

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~ End of Chapter 52 ~

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Chapter 53

Sūrah al–Najm ('The Star')

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بِسۡمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the most Merciful, the most Compassionate

Verses 1–18

The aim of the present chapter of the Qur'an is to emphasize three core doctrines of Islam: The oneness of God in Lordship (*rubūbiyya*), the Resurrection (*maʿād*), and prophethood (*nubuwwa*). It begins by discussing prophethood and confirming the veracity of the revelation that has been sent to the Prophet of Islam and describing it. Then, it turns to the oneness of God, rejecting all idols and partners to Him in the most eloquent and forceful manner, before illustrating the utter dependency of all creation upon Him and His governance thereof, in terms of giving life and death, causing some to laugh and others to weep, enriching some and impoverishing others, dealing out destruction and punishment, and calling humankind to the truth and warning them. God closes this discourse by calling attention to the Resurrection and commanding the audience to bow down and worship.

Based on the context and tone of its verses, this chapter is of Meccan provenance, and no heed should be given to the view that some or all of its verses are Medinan. Some have said that its first verses were a general announcement, which the Prophet recited to both the believers and the idolaters together. Two of the most beautiful verses to be found in this chapter are: *And that the terminus is toward your Lord* (53:42); *And that nothing belongs to man except what he strives for* (53:39).

For the purpose of our commentary, we have divided this chapter of the Qur'an into three tranche of verses. The first of these testifies to the veracity of the revelation that has been sent down to the Prophet and describes it. However, there are numerous narrations from the Imāms of the Prophet's Household that explicitly state that these verses are not intended as descriptions

for the entirety of the revelation, but rather the verbal revelation that God revealed to His Prophet during the Night Journey (*al-Miʿrāj*). This would make these verses are part of the story of the Night Journey, and this reading appears to be supported by the verses themselves. This is also confirmed by statements that have been narrated from some of the Companions of the Prophet such as Ibn ʿAbbās, Anas, Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī and others. These narrations have influenced the interpretations of the majority of commentators on this chapter, even if there is spirited disagreement between them on the precise meaning of some of the words and phrases to be found therein.

وَالنَّجْمِ إِذَا هَوَىٰ ﴿١﴾

(53:1) ***By the star when it sets***

Based on the apparent meaning of the verse, 'the star' (*al-najm*) is intended to refer to any luminous heavenly body. God invokes many created phenomena in the oaths He swears in the Qur'an, including a number of heavenly bodies, such as the Sun, the Moon, and other planets. Therefore, '*when it sets*' refers to its descent towards the western horizon.

Some have said that *the star* refers to the Qur'an, because it came down as a star. Others have said it refers to the Pleiades. Others have said Sirius. Still others have said that it refers to the shooting star that strikes down the devils of the Jinn when they ascend into the heavens, because the Arabs refer to this as a *najm*. Equally, for *when it sets*, commentators assign whatever meaning best suits their understanding of *the star*. However, none of these interpretations find any support in the wording of the verse.

مَا ضَلَّ صَاحِبُكُمْ وَمَا غَوَىٰ ﴿٢﴾

(53:2) ***your companion has neither gone astray, nor gone amiss***

'To go astray' (*ḍalāl*) means to stray from the right path, 'to go amiss' (*ghayy*) means to act contrary to good sense, which means to hit the mark. Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī says:

> '*Ghayy* refers to ignorance that stems from false beliefs. This is because a person can be ignorant without believing anything, correct or incorrect, or they can be ignorant because they believe something incorrect. It is this latter variety of ignorance that is known as *ghayy*, as God says in the verse, *your companion has neither gone astray, nor gone amiss*.'

The meaning of *your companion* here is, of course, the Messenger of God.

Therefore, the meaning of the verse is: 'Your companion has not strayed from the path that will lead him to the desired outcome, nor has he erred in his beliefs or opinions. In other words, it means that he has neither erred in identifying the desired outcome—which is human felicity in the form of serving God—or in the path to attain it.'

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وَمَا يَنْطِقُ عَنِ الْهَوَىٰ ۝٣ إِنْ هُوَ إِلَّا وَحْيٌ يُوحَىٰ ۝٤

(53:3–4) ***Nor does he speak out of desire, it is just a revelation that is revealed***

The meaning of desire (*hawā*) here is the desire of the ego (*hawā al-nafs*) and its opinions. Now, when God says he (the Prophet) does not '*speak*' out of desire, the word *speak* is general and it occurs in the context of a negation, which would suggest that it means to negate him speaking from desire in any capacity. However, because this verse is addressed to the idolaters, who accused him of lying about his divine message, fabricating the parts of the Qur'an he recited to them, and inventing lies about God, the context indicates that the intended meaning is that he does not speak from his own desire or opinions when it comes to him calling them toward God, or when he recites parts of the Qur'an to them. On the contrary, all of this is revelation sent down to him by God.

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عَلَّمَهُ شَدِيدُ الْقُوَىٰ ۝٥

(53:5) ***taught him by One of great powers.***

The pronoun 'him' in *taught him* refers to either the Prophet, the Qur'an insofar as it is a form of revelation (in which case, the translation would become *it was taught by One of great powers*), or to all the revelation sent down to him (with the same translation). In all cases, the second object of the verb *taught* is left implicit (because the pronoun refers to either the person being taught or the knowledge being taught to that person). Therefore, the full meaning is: 'He of great powers taught the revelation to the Prophet' or '...taught the Qur'an to the Prophet' or 'taught the revelation to the Prophet.'

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The *One of great powers* mentioned here—according to what some commentators have said—is the Archangel Gabriel, and God has described him elsewhere as powerful: *powerful and eminent with the Lord of the Throne* (81:20). Alternatively, some have said that *One of great powers* refers to God

Himself.

ذُو مِرَّةٍ فَاسْتَوَىٰ ﴿٦﴾

(53:6) *possessed of sound judgement* (dhū mirra). *He settled*

Mirra can mean severity, judiciousness of intellect, or a kind of traversal. Commentators have applied all three meanings to the present verse, assuming that it refers to Gabriel. Therefore, the meaning is that Gabriel is either severe for the sake of God, or that he is possessed of judicious intellect, or that he traverses the heavens to reach the Prophet.

Some have said that *possessed of sound judgement* refers to the Prophet, for he is the one who is severe for the sake of God, possessed of judicious intellect, or traversing in the sense that he traversed the heavens on his Night Journey.

He settled: To settle (*istiwā'*) means either to stand or take authority over something. The pronoun 'he' here refers to Gabriel, which renders the meaning that Gabriel stood in the original form in which God had created him. This is based on the narrations that state that Gabriel would descend to the Prophet in various forms, but that he only appeared to him in his original form twice. Alternatively, it means that Gabriel used his power to take authority over the affairs he had been made responsible for.

Alternatively, if the pronoun in *He settled* refers to the Prophet, this means that the Prophet went aright and remained steadfast.

وَهُوَ بِالْأُفُقِ الْأَعْلَىٰ ﴿٧﴾

(53:7) *while he was on the highest horizon*

A horizon (*ufuq*) refers to a direction. Some have said that *the highest horizon* denotes the easternmost part of the heavens, as the eastern horizon appears higher than the western one in terms of the earth's elevation. However, the problem with such an interpretation is obvious. Instead, the apparent meaning of *the highest horizon* is the highest horizon of the heavens, regardless of its cardinal direction.

The pronoun *he* in the verse refers to either Gabriel or the Prophet, and the sentence as a whole is an adverbial qualifier for *He settled* in the previous verse.

ثُمَّ دَنَا فَتَدَلَّىٰ ﴿٨﴾

(53:8) *Then he drew nearer and nearer* (thumma danā fa–tadallā)

Danā means to draw near, while *tadallā* means to cling to something, but it is used figuratively to express extreme nearness. Some have said that *tadallā* means to extend towards the ground, from *dalw* ('to dangle, hang, or suspend').

Therefore, the meaning of the verse—assuming that both pronouns refer back to Gabriel—is as follows: 'Then Gabriel approached the Prophet, clung to him, and took him up into the heavens.' Others have suggested the following: 'Then Gabriel descended from the highest horizon and approached the Prophet to ascend with him.'

On the other hand—assuming that both pronouns refer to the Prophet—the meaning is then as follows: 'Then the Prophet drew near to God and increased in nearness to Him.'

فَكَانَ قَابَ قَوْسَيْنِ أَوْ أَدْنَىٰ ﴿٩﴾

(53:9) ***until he was within two bows' length*** **(qāb qawsayn)** ***or even nearer***

In *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, al-Ṭabrisī writes that *qāb*, *qīb*, *qād*, and *qīd* refers to the measure of something. *Qaws* ('bow') is a device for shooting arrows, though in the Ḥijaẓī dialect, one also says *qaws* to refer to a cubit measure.

Therefore, the meaning of the verse is: 'The distance was the extent of two bows or of two cubits or even less than that.'

Some commentators have said that a *qāb* refers to the distance between the grip of a bow and its tip. Therefore, what was actually meant here was 'the two lengths of the bow' (*qābay qaws*; that is, from the grip to each of the tips) but this was reversed to 'two bow's lengths' instead. However, the problem with this is that there would be no difference in meaning between saying two *qāb*s of one bow or the *qāb* of two bows, so there is no need to reverse the word order.

فَأَوْحَىٰ إِلَىٰ عَبْدِهِ مَا أَوْحَىٰ ﴿١٠﴾

(53:10) ***whereat he revealed to His servant whatever he revealed***

Assuming the pronouns of the two instances of the verb *revealed* both refer to Gabriel, the meaning of the verse is: 'Whereat Gabriel revealed to God's servant—the Prophet—whatever he revealed.' Others have said that these pronouns refer to God, even though He has not been directly mentioned in the previous verses, because the context makes this obvious. In the event that all

three pronouns (*he*, *His*, and *he*) in the verse refer to God, this would render the meaning as follows: 'Whereat God revealed through Gabriel to His servant what He revealed.' Alternatively, the first pronoun refers to Gabriel, and the second and third refer to God, in which case the meaning becomes: 'Whereat Gabriel revealed what God revealed to him to God's servant.'

Now, if we say that the pronouns in the previous verses actually referred to the Prophet rather than Gabriel, this renders the meaning: 'God revealed to His servant whatever He revealed.' This reading is the one that appears to make more sense, rather than the previous one, which does not sound right, even if it appears grammatically valid.

مَا كَذَبَ الْفُؤَادُ مَا رَأَىٰ ﴿١١﴾

(53:11) *The heart did not err in* (kadhaba) *what it saw*

The verb *kadhaba* is derived from *kadhb*, which is the opposite of honesty (*ṣidq*). One might say, 'so-and-so has lied in what he said' (*kadhaba fulān fī ḥadīth-ihi*), or, 'he deceived him by what he said' (*kadhab-uhu al-ḥadīth*)—with the verb becoming doubly transitive (taking both the audience and the thing spoken as objects). In addition to speech and statements, one can also apply *kadhb* to errors of perception. For example: 'His eyes deceived him' (*kadhabat-hu ʿayn-uhu*), meaning that he erred in his vision.

So, when the verb *kadhb* is used in conjunction in the heart, it must be in this latter most meaning. Therefore, the meaning of the verse is: 'The heart of the Prophet did not err in what it saw' or 'The heart of the Prophet did not deceive him in what it saw.' In other words, the Prophet's heart saw things truthfully.

Therefore, *the heart* in this verse refers to the heart of the Prophet, and the pronoun *it* (which can also be read as 'he') in *what it saw* refers to the heart.

There is no problem in attributing sight—which is usually the function of the eyes—to the heart, for the human being experiences a kind of interior intuitive vision that is beyond what they perceive through their external senses, while imagination and thought take place through their interior faculties. This is something that all of us can experience, and we can see that this is neither something we see with our eyes, perceive with our sights, or think with our minds. Equally, we can hear, smell, taste, touch, and see that we can imagine and think, but this sight does not take place using our sights or any of our exterior or interior faculties. Equally, we can see that the perceptions of each of these faculties are specific to that faculty, but we can also perceive our own

perception of these things, and this perception does not take place using these faculties. Rather this meta-perception takes place using the faculty that we refer to as 'the heart' (*al-fu'ād*).

Now, there is nothing in this verse to suggest that the object of this vision is God, or that God appeared to the Prophet. Instead, what he saw was the highest horizon, drawing nearer, and the act of revelation. It is these things mentioned in the previous verses—all of which are signs of God—that he saw. This reading is supported by the subsequent verse, *The gaze did not swerve, nor did it overstep the bounds* (53:17).

Now, if we were to say that this vision was, in fact, of God, this would not be problematic, for it is a vision of the heart and the vision of the heart differs from that of physical sight, which perceives objects but can never perceive God. We have already discussed the vision of the heart (*ru'yat al-qalb*) in our commentary on Sūrah al-Aʿrāf (7:143).

As for the claim that the pronoun in *what it saw* actually refers to the Prophet (in which case the phrase should be read as 'what he saw'), which would render the meaning: 'The heart of the Prophet did not err concerning what he saw with his sight by saying, "I know you not!" As if it did say this it would have erred, for what appeared in his vision was exactly as he knew it to be in his heart.' In short, his heart confirmed what his eyes saw.

The same is true of the reading that says the verse means that his heart did not deny what his sight perceived, but rather confirmed it and believed in it. This is supported by the alternate recitation of the verse, in which *kadhaba* is read with a doubled *dhāl* (that is, *ka<u>dhdh</u>aba*).

However, the problem with this reading is that the context of the verses indicates that God is confirming the veracity of the Prophet in his claim to have received revelations from God and witnessed His greatest signs. If, as these readings suggest, the pronoun in *what it saw* was actually referring to the Prophet, then the verses would be arguing for the truthfulness of his vision on the basis of his own belief in it in his heart, which is not the usual approach of the Qur'an. This is not the case if the pronoun in *what it saw* refers to the heart (i.e. 'what the heart saw'), as this would mean that God is confirming the veracity of the Prophet's heart in what it saw, and this would place the verse in the same vein as the earlier verse, *your companion has neither gone astray, nor gone amiss. Nor does he speak out of desire: it is just a revelation that is revealed*.

Now, one might try to argue that, in the following verse, *Will you then dispute with him about what he saw?* (53:12), God does argue for the Prophet's truthfulness on the basis of his vision. Therefore, there is no difference between

this and between arguing for his veracity on the basis of the fact that his heart believed what he saw with his eyes.

To this, I would respond that the following verse, *Will you then dispute with him about what he saw?*, is not intended to provide an argument for the truthfulness of his vision, but rather to rebuke those who dispute with him concerning something he had witnessed directly and debate with him about it. After all, disputation is only possible in theoretical, doctrinal, or conceptual matters, one cannot dispute something that another person has witnessed directly. Therefore, it is meaningless to debate and dispute about it, for the Prophet is only telling them about something he saw directly, not something he conceived or thought of in his mind.

أَفَتُمَارُونَهُ عَلَىٰ مَا يَرَىٰ ﴿١٢﴾

(53:12) *Will you then dispute with him about what he saw?*

This is a rhetorical question intended to serve as a rebuke addressed to the idolaters. The pronouns *him* and *he* refer to the Prophet and the word used for *dispute* here (*al-mumārāt*) means to persistently debate with someone. Therefore, the meaning of the verse is: 'Will you persist in disputing with the Prophet and trying to convince him of the opposite of what he claims and what he relates to you, while this is something he experienced directly?'

وَلَقَدْ رَآهُ نَزْلَةً أُخْرَىٰ ﴿١٣﴾

(52:13) *Certainly he saw it yet another time* (nazla)

The word *nazla* means an instance of descent (*nuzūl*). This verse indicates that the story of this vision took place during one time of descent, while the previous verses are discussing a different time of descent.

Some commentators have said that the subject of the verb *he saw* refers to the Prophet and '*it*' refers to Gabriel. Therefore, the 'descent' is that of Gabriel to the Prophet in order to take him up to the highest heavens. Meanwhile, *by the Lote Tree of the Ultimate Boundary* is an adverb for *saw* not *another time*, and this means that he saw Gabriel while he was in his original form.

Therefore, this would render the meaning that Gabriel descended to the Prophet on another occasion, took him to the heavens, then appeared to him at the Lote Tree of the Ultimate Boundary, taking on his original form.

However, from what we have already discussed, it appears that what the Prophet saw was not Gabriel but God and that this was a vision that took

place in his heart. Therefore, the meaning of *nazla* here is the setting down of the Prophet at the Lote Tree of the Ultimate Boundary during his ascent into the heavens. Therefore, the meaning is that the Prophet stopped at the Lote Tree a second time during his Night Journey and saw God with his heart again exactly as he had seen Him on the first occasion.

عِنْدَ سِدْرَةِ الْمُنْتَهَىٰ ﴿١٤﴾ عِنْدَهَا جَنَّةُ الْمَأْوَىٰ ﴿١٥﴾ إِذْ يَغْشَى السِّدْرَةَ مَا يَغْشَىٰ ﴿١٦﴾

(53:14–16) ***by the Lote Tree of the Ultimate Boundary, near which is the Garden of the Abode, when there covered the Lote Tree what covered it.***

A Lote tree (*sidra*) is a well-known species of tree, while the Ultimate Boundary (*muntahā*) appears to be the name of a specific place, possibly the utmost limit of the heavens, based on the fact that it is close to paradise and paradise is in the heavens, as per the verse, *And in the sky is your provision and what you are promised* (51:22).

There is nothing else in the Qur'an that expounds the nature of this tree. In fact, it is left deliberately ambiguous, for example, *when there covered the Lote Tree what covered it*. Some narrations have explained that it is a tree that sits above the Seven Heavens to which all the deeds of humanity are delivered. We will look at some of these below.

Near which is the Garden of the Abode: This means that the paradise which the faithful will inhabit is nearby, and this is different from the final paradise, for in the Isthmus (*Barzakh*) the faithful will inhabit a limited and temporary paradise until the time of the Resurrection. God says: ...*for them are gardens of the Abode—a hospitality for what they used to do* (32:19); *When the Greatest Catastrophe befalls... his refuge will indeed be paradise* (79:34–41);

And this exists in the heavens, as per the verse we have already mentioned: *And in the sky is your provision and what you are promised* (51:22).

It has been said that this is a reference to the paradise of the Isthmus.

When there covered the Lote Tree what covered it: To cover something (*ghashyān*) is to envelop it completely, therefore the meaning is 'when there enveloped the Lote Tree what enveloped it.' What exactly it was that covered the Lote Tree has been left deliberately ambiguous, as we have already highlighted.

مَا زَاغَ الْبَصَرُ وَمَا طَغَىٰ ﴿١٧﴾

(53:17) ***The gaze did not swerve*** **(zāgh)*****, nor did it overstep the bounds*** **(taghā)**

The verb *zāgh* means to incline away from uprightness, while *taghā* means to go beyond the limits in one's behavior. For the gaze to swerve means for it to perceive something in a form other than what it is, while for it to overstep the bounds means for it to perceive something utterly unreal. The gaze in question, of course, is the gaze of the Prophet.

Therefore, the meaning of the verse is that he did not see what he saw in any way other than it truly was, nor did he see anything that was unreal. On the contrary, he saw with flawless perception.

Of course, the perception being discussed here is the perception of the Prophet's heart, not his eyes. And this perception took place when *he saw it yet another time* (53:12). This shows that he had already experienced a similar vision the first time around—a vision which was referenced in the earlier verse, *The heart did not deny what it saw. Will you then dispute with him about what he saw?!* (53:11–12)

لَقَدْ رَأَىٰ مِنْ آيَاتِ رَبِّهِ الْكُبْرَىٰ ﴿١٨﴾

(53:18) ***Certainly he saw some of the greatest signs of his Lord.***

Note that the verse says he saw *some* of the greatest signs of his Lord. The meaning is: 'I swear that he witnessed some of his Lord's greatest signs.' This is how he witnessed his Lord through his heart, for one witnesses God in one's heart by witnessing His signs insofar as they are His signs. This is because every sign points to its referent—it never points to itself, or else it would not be a sign by its very nature.

As for witnessing God's essence without the mediation of His signs and piercing the divine veil, this is impossible, as evinced by the verse, *but they cannot comprehend Him in their knowledge* (20:11).

Examining Narrations

(1) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, concerning the verse, *By the star when it sets* (53:1), we read: '*The star* is the Messenger of God, *when it sets* (idhā hawā) is when God took him to the heavens, and he was in the sky (*hawī*).'

Author's comments: The Prophet is also identified as *the star* in a

narration that al-Qummī transmits from his father, from al-Ḥusayn b. Khālid, from Imām al-Riḍā, and this is an esoteric interpretation.

(2) In *al-Kāfī*, al-Kulaynī narrates from al-Qummī, from his father, from Ibn Abī ʿUmayr, from Muḥammad b. Muslim, who said: 'I asked Imām al-Bāqir about the ambiguity of the verses, *By the night when it envelops* (92:1) and *By the star when it sets*. He said, "Surely God Almighty swears by whatever parts of His creation He wishes, but His creations cannot swear except by Him!"'

Author's comments: A similar narration is found in al-Ṣadūq's *Man lā yaḥḍuruh al-faqīh*, narrated from ʿAlī b. Mahziyār, from Imām al-Jawād.

(3) In *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, al-Ṭabrisī says that the masses narrate that Imām al-Bāqir said: 'Surely Muḥammad descended from the Seventh Heaven on the night of his Ascension, and when the chapter of the Qur'an was revealed, ʿUtba b. Abī Lahab learned of that, came to the Prophet divorced his daughter and spat in his face, saying: "You have disbelieved in the Star and the Lord of the Star!" So the Prophet prayed against him, saying: "O God, give him to one of your beasts!" ʿUtba set out for Syria and set down along the way. God cast fear into him and he turned to his companions and said: "Let me sleep between you tonight." They agreed, but then a lion came and seized him from their midst.'

Author's comments: Al-Ṭabrisī relates verses of poetry from Ḥassān on this subject, and the same story is narrated in *al-Durr al-manthūr* by various routes.

(4) In *al-Kāfī*, al-Kulaynī narrates from Hishām, Ḥammād, and others: 'We heard Imām al-Ṣādiq say: "My words are the words of my father, my father's words are the words of my grandfather, my grandfather's words are the words of al-Ḥusayn, and al-Ḥusayn's words are the words of al-Ḥasan, and al-Ḥasan's words are the words of the Commander of the Faithful, and the Commander of the Faithful's words are the words of the Messenger of God, and the words of the Messenger of God are the words of God.'

(5) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, it is related via a chain of narrators going back to Ibn Sinān that Imām al-Ṣādiq said: 'He means that the Prophet is the closest of creatures to God, and that he was in such a position that when Gabriel ascended with him to the heavens, he told him: "Go forth, O Muḥammad! For you have stepped where no nearmost angel nor prophet sent by God hath ever set foot!" And were it not

for the fact that his spirit and his soul were of that place, he would not have been able to reach it, and this was from God Almighty. As God says, *until he was within two bows' length or even nearer* (53:9)—meaning, in fact, that he was even nearer.'

(6) In *al-Iḥtijāj*, in a lengthy tradition narrated from ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn, we read: 'I am the son of he who ascended to great heights, went beyond the Lote Tree of the Ultimate Boundary and was within two bows' length or even nearer to His Lord.'

Author's comments: The same meaning has been expressed in numerous traditions from the Imāms of the Prophet's Household.

(7) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, Ibn Mundhir and Ibn Mardawayh narrate from Abū al-Saʿīd al-Khudrī: 'When the Prophet was taken on the Night Journey, he drew near to his Lord until He was within two bows' length or even nearer... do you not see how close the bow is to the bowstring?'

(8) In the same source, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, al-Ṭabarānī, and Ibn Mardawayh narrate from Ibn ʿAbbās, concerning the verse, *Then he drew nearer and nearer* (53:8): 'That is Muḥammad who drew nearer and nearer to his Lord.'

(9) In *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, it is narrated with an incomplete chain from Anas, that the Messenger of God said about the verse, *until he was within two bows' length or even nearer*: 'The length of two cubits or less than two cubits.'

(10) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, concerning the verse, *whereat he revealed to His servant whatever he revealed* (53:10), we read: 'Revelation spoken directly to him.'

(11) In *al-Tawḥīd*, al-Ṣadūq narrates via a chain of narrators going back to Muḥammad b. al-Fuḍayl: 'I asked Abū al-Ḥasan: "Did the Messenger of God see his Lord?" He said: "Yes, he saw Him with his heart. Have you not heard the saying of God Almighty: *The heart did not deny what it saw* (53:11)? He did not see Him with his sight, but saw Him with his heart instead."'

(12) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, ʿAbd b. Ḥamīd, Ibn Mundhir, and Ibn Abī Ḥātim narrate from Muḥammad b. Kaʿb al-Qurazī from one of the Prophet's Companions, that the people asked him: 'O Messenger of God, have you seen your Lord?' He replied: 'I have not seen Him with my eye, rather I have seen Him twice with my heart.' Then he recited the verse, *Then he drew nearer and nearer*.

Author's comments: Al-Nasā'ī narrates a tradition with the same meaning as the one in *al-Durr al-manthūr* from Abū Dharr. In it, he says: 'The Messenger of God saw his Lord with his heart, he did not see Him with his sight.'

(13) In *Ṣaḥīḥ Muslim*, al-Tirmidhī, and Ibn Mardawayh, it is narrated from Abū Dharr: 'I asked the Messenger of God: "Have you seen your Lord?" He said: "I have seen Him in a luminous form (*nūrānī*)."'

Author's comments: The word *nūrānī* is derived from *nūr* (light) in the same way that *jismānī* (corporeal) is derived from *jism* (body). The tradition can also be read as, 'As light, I saw Him' (*nūrun innī arā-hu*). This appears to be a scribal error, although it is supported by other narrations.

For example, it is narrated by Muslim in his *Ṣaḥīḥ* and Ibn Mardawayh from Abū Dharr, that he asked the Messenger of God: 'Have you seen your Lord?' He said: 'I saw Him as light.'

In any case, the meaning of seeing God in these traditions is to see Him with one's heart rather than with one's physical sight, and the light mentioned here is not of the variety that is seen with the eye.

(14) In *al-Kāfī*, via a chain of narrators going back to Ṣafwān b. Yaḥyā, he said: 'Abū Qurra the scholar of traditions asked me to take him to see Abū al-Ḥasan al-Riḍā, so I sought his permission for him to visit him, and he granted it, so he came in and asked him about various legal issues... Abū Qurra asked about the verse, *Certainly he saw it yet another time* (53:13). Imām al-Riḍā responded: 'What follows this verse indicates what he saw, when God says, *The heart did not deny what it saw*, meaning that the heart of Muḥammad did not deny what his eyes saw. Then God tells us what he saw, *Certainly he saw some of the greatest signs of his Lord* (53:18). And the signs of God are not the same as God Himself.'

Author's comments: It appears that the Imām spoke these words in the context of a debate with Abū Qurra, in which the latter wished to argue for the possibility of seeing God with one's physical eyes. Therefore, the Imām argues that this vision is only of the signs of God, an the signs of God are not identical with God. Of course, this does not mean that seeing the signs of God is not the same as seeing God, even if they are distinct from His essence, or that this vision takes place in the heart, as has already been discussed in a number of traditions.

(15) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, 'Alī b. Ibrāhīm narrates from his father, from Ibn Abī 'Umayr, from Hishām, from Imām al-Ṣādiq that the Prophet

said: 'I reached the Lote Tree of the Ultimate Boundary, and—behold!—one of its leaves was enough to grant shade to an entire nation, and I was within two bows' length distance or even nearer to my Lord.'

(16) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, Aḥmad and Ibn Jarīr narrate from Anas that the Messenger of God said: 'I reached the Lote Tree of the Ultimate Boundary, and—behold!—its blossoms were like locusts, its leaves were like the ears of an elephant, and when it was covered by the command of God, it transformed into rubies, emeralds, and the like thereof.'

(17) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, it is narrated via a chain going back to Ismāʿīl al-Juʿfī, from Imām al-Bāqir, in a lengthy tradition: 'When he reached the Lote Tree of the Ultimate Boundary, Gabriel hung back. The Messenger of God said, "Will you abandon me at this stage?" Gabriel replied: "Go forth, for by God you have reached a place none of God's creatures have ever reached before you!" Then a saw the light of my Lord and *subḥa* separated us.'

The narrator asked: 'What is *subḥa*, may I be your ransom?'

He pointed with his face to the ground and with his hand to the heavens, saying: 'Magnificent is my Lord, magnificent is my Lord' (*jalāl rabbī*, *jalāl rabbī*) three times.

(18) In the same source, concerning the passage, *Certainly he saw it yet another time by the Lote Tree of the Ultimate Boundary*: 'In the Seventh Heaven.'

(19) In the same source, concerning the verse, *when there covered the Lote Tree what covered it* (53:16), we read: 'When He removed the veil between Himself and the Messenger of God, the light of the Lote Tree was covered.'

Author's comments: There are other narrations with the same meanings as the above, and we have already presented detailed and comprehensive traditions on the Prophet's Night Journey at the beginning of our commentary on Sūrah al-Isrā' (Chapter 17).

There, after looking at these narrations, we discussed the different versions of the Prophet's ascent into the heavens, whether he was asleep or awake and, if the latter, whether he ascended body and spirit or only spirit. We narrated from Ibn Shahrāshūb that the position of the Imāmiyya is that—based on the verses about the Night Journey—the portion of the journey that was from the Holy Mosque in Mecca to the Farthest Mosque was undertaken in

body and spirit together, but that there was disagreement about the journey from the Farthest Mosque into the heavens. Some say that it was undertaken in body and spirit together—something which many Shīʿī authorities agreed upon—but some others have said that it was only undertaken in spirit, and this is the view that some of the later Shīʿī authorities have inclined towards.

And there is no problem in adopting this view given that it is supported by many of the contextual indicators surrounding the verses and narrations on this topic. However, if we do take the view that the journey was purely spiritual, then we must interpret the verse, *near which is the Garden of the Abode*, as referring to the paradise that is found in the Isthmus via a kind of association, in the same vein as a person's grave can either become one of the meadow of paradise or one of the pits of hell, or we must read the verse in a way that does not conflict with the idea that the Prophet's ascent into the heavens was purely spiritual in nature.

As for the idea that the Night Journey took place while he was asleep, we have already discussed in our commentary on Sūrah al-Isrā' that this interpretation does not have a strong basis.

As for the idea that the Night Journey was actually a journey through space, in which the Prophet visited other worlds within our solar system, or worlds within solar systems other than our own, or even other galaxies, this is not something that finds any support in the traditions that detail the Night Journey, nor in the contents of the aforementioned verses.

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Verses 19–32

This section of verses constitutes the second of the three parts that make up this chapter. It deals with the question of idols and idol-worship, specifically the idea that these idols offer intercession with God, and refutes these beliefs in the most eloquent and forceful manner. It also alludes to the Resurrection, which is the central theme of the third part of the chapter.

أَفَرَأَيْتُمُ اللَّاتَ وَالْعُزَّىٰ ﴿١٩﴾ وَمَنَاةَ الثَّالِثَةَ الْأُخْرَىٰ ﴿٢٠﴾

(53:19–20) ***Have you considered Lāt and ʿUzza? and Manāt, the third one?***

The previous verses attested to the truthfulness of the Prophet and the authenticity of his claim to be receiving divine revelation, and from the truth of prophethood logically follows the truth of monotheism (*tawḥīd*) and the negation of partners from God. Therefore, the discussion turns to the idols Lāt, ʿUzza, and Manāt, whom the idolaters of Mecca believed were the representations of angels and that they were female, or that some of them were angels and others were people, as some have said. These verses negate their divinity and their lordship, their femininity, and the claim that they have the power to intercede for mortals independently of God. These verses also discuss other realities pertaining to the Resurrection and the recompense for deeds.

Lāt, ʿUzza, and Manāt were three idols who were worshipped by the pre-Islamic Arabs. Differing accounts have been given concerning their appearances, their locations, their worshippers, and the reasons for their worship. There is no way to determine which of these conflicting reports are accurate and, therefore, there is no way to rely on any of them. Here, we have confined ourselves to what has been established with certainty.

Therefore, the meaning of these two verses is as follows: 'If the reality of the situation is as We have described it with regards to the truthfulness of the Prophet, his claim to receive revelations from God, his message, and his mission, tell me, then, about the three idols Lāt, ʿUzza, and Manāt, and others like them, who you claim are angels and the daughters of God...'

أَلَكُمُ الذَّكَرُ وَلَهُ الْأُنْثَىٰ ﴿٢١﴾ تِلْكَ إِذًا قِسْمَةٌ ضِيزَىٰ ﴿٢٢﴾

(53:21–22) ***Are you to have males and He females? That, then, will be an unfair division!***

This is a rhetorical question with the force of a denial and a hint of derision.

The meaning of these verses is as follows: 'If this is the case, and the angelic spirits of these idols are God's daughters, but you are only happy to have sons for yourselves, then shall you have only males and God Almighty only females? This would be a plainly unjust division!'

إِنْ هِيَ إِلَّا أَسْمَاءٌ سَمَّيْتُمُوهَا أَنْتُمْ وَآبَاؤُكُمْ مَا أَنْزَلَ اللَّهُ بِهَا مِنْ سُلْطَانٍ ۚ إِنْ يَتَّبِعُونَ إِلَّا الظَّنَّ وَمَا تَهْوَى الْأَنْفُسُ ۖ وَلَقَدْ جَاءَهُمْ مِنْ رَبِّهِمُ الْهُدَىٰ ﴿٢٣﴾

(53:23) ***These are but names which you have coined—you and your fathers—for which Allah has not sent down any authority* (sulṭān).** ***They follow nothing but conjectures and the desires of the soul, while there has already come to them the guidance from their Lord.***

These refers to Lāt, 'Uzza, and Manāt or to idols in general. *Authority* means proof or evidence.

Therefore, the meaning of this part of the verse is: 'These idols are not divinities but rather names that you have contrived yourselves—you and your fathers—names which do not refer to anything real, and for whose lordship and divinity God has not sent down any proof!'

The force of the verse, then, is a refutation of the idolaters for not having any evidence for the divinity of their gods.

They follow nothing but conjectures and the desires of the soul...: This sentence condemns the idolaters for following falsehood and emphasizes that there is no proof for any of their beliefs.

... while there has already come to them the guidance from their Lord: This sentence is an adverb for the preceding one.

The meaning is as follows: 'These idolaters only follow conjectures and their own selfish inclinations concerning their deities. They follow these even while guidance has come from God—who is their actual Lord—and this guidance is the true call of the Messenger or the Qur'an, which will guide them to the truth.'

Note that this verse transitions from addressing the idolaters directly to speaking about them in the third person. This is to imply that their level of understanding is too low to grasp these words because they are not ready to hear decisive arguments when all they follow is conjecture and selfish inclinations.

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أَمْ لِلْإِنْسَانِ مَا تَمَنَّىٰ ﴿٢٤﴾

(53:24) ***Shall man have whatever he yearns for?***

This is another rhetorical question with the force of a denial, namely that the human being should not have something merely because he wants it. Therefore, the idolaters should not have the intercession of the angels—whom they claim to be the spirits of the idols they worship and the daughters of God—just because they wish it to be so, or that these idols should be genuine divinities just because they wish it to be so.

This verse hints at the fact that they have no proof for the divinity of their gods or for the intercession of these deities save for the fact that they desire it, and that wishing something to be the case does not make it so.

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فَلِلَّهِ الْآخِرَةُ وَالْأُولَىٰ ﴿٢٥﴾

(53:25) ***Yet to Allah belong this world and the Hereafter***

This follows logically from the previous verse as it explains the rationale behind it. In other words: The human being cannot have whatever he wants just because he wants it as this world and the Hereafter both belong to God alone and He has no partner in His dominion over them.

وَكَمْ مِنْ مَلَكٍ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ لَا تُغْنِي شَفَاعَتُهُمْ شَيْئًا إِلَّا مِنْ بَعْدِ أَنْ يَأْذَنَ اللَّهُ لِمَنْ يَشَاءُ وَيَرْضَىٰ ﴿٢٦﴾

(53:26) ***How many an angel there is in the heavens whose intercession is of no avail in any way except after Allah grants permission*** **(ya'dhan)** ***to whomever He wishes and approves of*** **(yarḍā)*!***

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The difference between permission (*idhn*) and approval (*riḍā*) is as follows: Permission indicates that the one granting permission has removed an impediment to something. On the other hand, approval means that the approver finds something pleasing to himself and does not prevent it from

taking place. Therefore, a person might grant permission for something he does not approve of, but one will not approve of something for which they have not granted permission, whether explicitly or implicitly.

The context of this verse is rejecting the idea that the angels have the power to intercede for human beings of their own accord independently of God, which is what the idol-worshippers wish to be the case. On the contrary, the verse makes clear that this matter solely belongs to God, and that only those may intercede to whom He has given permission to do so and approved of.

Based on this, the phrase, *to whomever He wishes*, means 'of the angels' and the meaning of the verse as a whole is: 'Many of the angels in the heavens have no power to intercede until God has granted permission to do so to whomever of them He wishes and approved of their intercession.'

Some have said this means *to whomever He wishes* 'of humankind', in which case the meaning of the verse becomes: 'Except after God has permitted them to intercede for whomever He wishes them to from humankind and approved of them, and how can He permit them to intercede for or approve of someone who disbelieves in Him and worships other deities?'

Therefore, the verse affirms the possibility of angels interceding for humans, but qualifies this by making it dependent upon God's permission and approval.

إِنَّ الَّذِينَ لَا يُؤْمِنُونَ بِالْآخِرَةِ لَيُسَمُّونَ الْمَلَائِكَةَ تَسْمِيَةَ الْأُنْثَىٰ ﴿٢٧﴾

(53:27) ***Indeed those who do not believe in the Hereafter give female names to the angels***

This is a repudiation of their claim that the angels are female that follows from the repudiation of their power to intercede independently of God.

When God accuses the idolaters of giving female names to the angels, this refers to their belief that the angels are God's daughters. Therefore, this refers to a belief that angels as a species are feminine, rather than merely assigning one or more of them female names.

Some have said that this verse means that the idolaters gave each and every one of the angels a female name, in the sense that they called each one of them God's daughter.

Others have said that giving female names to the angels is equated to disbelieving in the Hereafter to show that this is such an abominable and atrocious act that merits such a terrible punishment in the Hereafter that only someone who does not believe in the Hereafter whatsoever would dare to do it.

وَمَا لَهُمْ بِهِ مِنْ عِلْمٍ ۖ إِنْ يَتَّبِعُونَ إِلَّا الظَّنَّ ۖ وَإِنَّ الظَّنَّ لَا يُغْنِي مِنَ الْحَقِّ شَيْئًا ﴿٢٨﴾

(53:28) ***They do not have any knowledge of that. They follow nothing but conjectures, and indeed conjecture is no substitute for the truth.***

'Knowledge' (*'ilm*) refers to something that is undeniably true, while 'conjecture' (*ẓann*) refers to the more likely of two possibilities, while the less likely of two possibilities is 'supposition' (*wahm*).

However, the idolaters' belief that the angels were feminine was neither something known to them, or could it be said to be the more likely possibility, for there is no basis for giving it more likelihood than the opposite belief (that they were not). However, in as much as this belief was founded on their own selfish inclinations, and their egos prompted them to follow such inclinations and made them seem decorous to them, they did not pay attention to the possibility of such a belief being untrue. In fact, whenever they saw indications to the contrary of this belief, they turned away from them and clung instead to what they desired. This is why the Qur'an refers to this as 'conjecture', even while, in reality, it is pure fantasy.

This would appear to confirm the reading of this verse and the previous one, *They follow nothing but conjectures and the desires of the soul* (53:23), that says the word *ẓann* is being used in the sense of 'imagination' rather than 'likely belief.' This is further supported by al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī's observation that the word *ẓann* is sometimes used in the sense of something false or illusory.

... and indeed conjecture is no substitute for the truth: 'Truth' (*ḥaqq*) means 'something as it is really is', and it appears from the verse that this can only be obtained through knowledge (*'ilm*), which refers to an undeniable belief, and nothing else. As for levels of belief other than knowledge, which admit the possibility of their opposites being true, there is no guarantee that these beliefs represent their objects as they truly are in reality. Therefore, such beliefs cannot be relied upon as a yardstick in determining what is real and true, as per the verse: *Do not follow that of which you have no knowledge* (17:36).

As for acting on conjecture in the practical rulings of Islam, this is only permitted because there is evidence that qualifies the meaning of the verse with regards to practical and legal affairs. However, all matters of belief and doctrine fall within the scope of the verse.

Some have said that God repeats the word '*conjecture*' in the phrase *indeed*

conjecture is no substitute for the truth, having used just a moment previously, in order to give it the force of an aphorism (*mathal*).

فَأَعْرِضْ عَنْ مَنْ تَوَلَّىٰ عَنْ ذِكْرِنَا وَلَمْ يُرِدْ إِلَّا الْحَيَاةَ الدُّنْيَا ﴿٢٩﴾

(53:29) ***So avoid those who turn away from Our remembrance and desire nothing but the life of the world***

This follows on from the fact that the idolaters only follow conjectures and their own selfish desires. Note, however, that God does not merely say, 'so avoid them', and instead replaces the pronoun 'them' with *those who turn away from Our remembrance...* to show the real reason why He is commanding the Prophet to avoid them. It is as if to say: 'Those who forsake knowledge and follow conjectures and selfish desires only do that because they have turned away from our remembrance and desire this worldly life. Therefore, they have nothing save for this world and that is the extent of their knowledge. If this is the case, then keep away from them, for they are in error.'

The meaning of 'Our remembrance' (*dhikrinā*) here is the Qur'an, which guides its followers to the manifest truth and leads them to felicity in the eternal abode that lies beyond this world through definitive proofs and conclusive evidences that leave no room for doubt.

As for reading *Our remembrance* as meaning 'the remembrance of God'—as opposed to 'heedlessness' (*ghafla*)—this means to remember God in a way that befits His exalted essence, such as through His divine names and attributes, which guide people to truths and realities about the Origin and the Return in such a way that can leave no doubt in their minds.

ذَٰلِكَ مَبْلَغُهُمْ مِنَ الْعِلْمِ ۚ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنْ ضَلَّ عَنْ سَبِيلِهِ وَهُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنِ اهْتَدَىٰ ﴿٣٠﴾

(53:30) ***That is the ultimate reach*** **(mablagh)** ***of their knowledge. Indeed your Lord knows best those who stray from His way, and He knows best those who are guided.***

'*That*' refers to *the life of the world* in the previous verse. The word *mablagh* literally means 'the place something has reached.' Therefore, when God says that the life of this world is *the ultimate reach of their knowledge*, it is as though their knowledge reached this world and went no further. Moreover, because they know nothing besides it, this world became the focus of their

desires, the target of their ambitions, and the utmost extent of their hopes, such that they would not accept anything other than it.

Indeed your Lord knows best...: This emphasizes the meaning of the previous sentence because God testifies to it.

وَلِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَمَا فِي الْأَرْضِ لِيَجْزِيَ الَّذِينَ أَسَاءُوا بِمَا عَمِلُوا وَيَجْزِيَ الَّذِينَ أَحْسَنُوا بِالْحُسْنَىٰ ﴿٣١﴾

(53:31) ***To Allah belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth, that He may requite those who do evil for what they have done, and reward those who do good with the best.***

It is possible that the beginning of this verse is an adverbial qualifier for *Indeed your Lord knows best*, in which case this renders the meaning: 'Indeed your Lord knows best about both those who are guided and those who are astray, for He possesses whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth, so how can He not know them when He possesses them?'

If this is the case, then it appears that the phrase, *that He may requite...* follows on from the earlier verse, *So avoid those who turn away from Our remembrance* (53:29), in which case the meaning becomes: 'So turn away from them and leave their affair to God that He might requite them in such-and-such a way and reward you and the doers of good in such-and-such a way.'

However, it is possible to read the phrase, *To Allah belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth* as the beginning of a new statement that is intended to show that the command to leave the idolaters alone does not mean that they will be forgotten or let off, rather God will recompense each and every person for their deeds, whether good or bad. Note also that the verse explicitly mentions the name *Allah* rather than the pronoun 'He', and this is in order to emphasise God's greatness.

Therefore, the phrase, *To Allah belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is in the earth*, highlights God's complete and utter dominion over all things, and that all things ultimately subsist by His will, because He is their creator and originator. As His dominion over all things stems from His creation of all things and, in addition to that, He is also the source of the order and direction of all things. In conclusion, then, this phrase emphasizes God's creation and governance of the cosmos, as if to say: 'To God belongs all creation and governance.'

In this case, the phrase, *that He may requite*, follows on from this and

explains its purpose, with the meaning: 'To God belongs all creation and governance, and the purpose and reason for this is that He may requite those who do evil…' Now, in the Qur'an, when God speaks about requital and recompense, this pertains to the Day of Resurrection. Equally, doing good and evil relates to obeying and disobeying God. When God says, those who have done evil will be recompensed *for what they have done* (bi mā ʿamilū), this can also be read as 'with what they have done', so they will either be recompensed for their deeds or they will be recompensed with the reality of those deeds. Finally, those who do good will receive the best reward.

Therefore, according to this reading, the meaning becomes: 'So that God can recompense those who disobey for their disobedience (or with their disobedience) and those who obey Him with the best of rewards.' Commentators have suggested other readings still for the verse, but what we have presented here is the closest to the apparent meaning of the text.

الَّذِينَ يَجْتَنِبُونَ كَبَائِرَ الْإِثْمِ وَالْفَوَاحِشَ إِلَّا اللَّمَمَ ۚ إِنَّ رَبَّكَ وَاسِعُ
الْمَغْفِرَةِ ۚ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِكُمْ إِذْ أَنْشَأَكُمْ مِنَ الْأَرْضِ وَإِذْ أَنْتُمْ أَجِنَّةٌ فِي
بُطُونِ أُمَّهَاتِكُمْ ۖ فَلَا تُزَكُّوا أَنْفُسَكُمْ ۖ هُوَ أَعْلَمُ بِمَنِ اتَّقَىٰ ﴿٣٢﴾

(53:32) ***Those who avoid major sins*** **(kabāʾir al-ithm)** ***and indecencies*** **(fawāḥish)*****, excepting lapses*** **(lamam)*****. Indeed your Lord is expansive in forgiveness. He knows you best since He produced you from the earth, and since you were fetuses in the bellies of your mothers. So do not flaunt your piety: He knows best those who are Godwary.***

The word '*ithm*' signifies 'sin', but its original meaning—according to al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī—is an action that detains a person from reward and goodness, while *kabāʾir al-ithm*—according to a narration[1]—is anything for which God has threatened people with the punishment of hellfire, and we have already discussed this in our commentary on the verse, *If you avoid the major sins that you are forbidden, We will absolve you of your misdeeds* (4:31).

Fawāḥish ('indecencies') are abominable and unpleasant sins, and God has used this term in the Qur'an to refer to fornication and sodomy, and it seems from the apparent meaning of this verse that these are counted amongst

1 Narrated in *Thawāb al-aʿmāl* from ʿAbbād b. Kathīr al-Nawwāʾ from Imām al-Bāqir.

the major sins.

As for *lamam* ('lapses'), commentators have differed concerning the meaning of this term, with some saying that it signifies minor sins, in which case there is no real exception being made here for major sins or indecencies.

Others have said it means those actions that lead up to a sin but without the sin being committed, in which case the previous observation about the exception is also true here.

Others still have said that *lamam* are occasional sins, to which a person has not become habituated, that happen unintentionally, whether major or minor. In this case, the meaning of the verse accords with God's description of the virtuous in Sūrah Āl 'Imrān: *and those who, when they commit an indecent act or wrong themselves, remember Allah, and plead forgiveness for their sins—and who forgives sins except Allah?—and who do not persist in what they have committed while they know* (3:135).

The traditions of the Prophet's Household have explained the verse in terms of the third meaning presented here.[1]

This verse expounds the meaning of the phrase in the previous verse, *those who do good* (53:31). In other words, those who do good are the ones who avoid major sins and indecencies, but they can still experience lapses.

Indeed your Lord is expansive in forgiveness: This encourages them to repent in the hopes of being forgiven for their sins.

He knows you best since He produced you* (ansha'a–kum) *from the earth...: According to al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, the verb *nash'a* ('to produce') means to bring something forth and nurture it. Therefore, when God says He produced them from the earth, He is referring to their creation in stages, beginning with the material elements of their existence, then their taking the form of semen, and then a zygote in the womb.

... and since you were fetuses* (ajinna) *in the bellies of your mothers: The word *ajinna* ('fetuses') is the plural of *jinīn*. This sentence follows on from the previous sentence, *since He produced you*. Therefore, it means: 'And He

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1 In *al-Kāfī*, it is narrated from Ibn 'Ammār, from Imām al-Ṣādiq: 'A lapse is when a man slips into a sin then pleads to God for forgiveness for it.'
In the same source, via a chain of narrators going back to Muḥammad b. Muslim, from Imām al-Ṣādiq, we read: 'It is a sin that a man slips into, then avoids for a while, then slips into again.'
In the same source, via a chain of narrators going back to Ibn 'Ammār, from Imām al-Ṣādiq, we read: 'He has a moment in which he slips into one sin or another, but it is not from his nature.' (Auth.)

knows you best since you were fetuses in the bellies of your mothers. He knows your reality, your state of being, your secrets, and what will become of you.'

So do not flaunt your piety: This is the conclusion drawn from God's knowledge of them. In other words: 'If God knows you best from your inception, then do not portray yourselves as pure and free from sin, for He knows best who is Godwary.'

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Verses 33–62

The context of the first nine verses of this section coheres with the account that has been transmitted in the literature dealing with occasions of revelation (*asbāb al-nuzūl*) in this regard. According to this narration, there was a Muslim man who would spend out of his wealth in the way of God, but that someone reproached him for giving excessively and warned him that he would be left poor and penniless himself. The person who reproached him promised to bear the burden of his sins and misdeeds, so the man ceased spending in the way of God, and these verses were revealed.

By referring to these events and invoking the scriptures of Moses and Abraham, God seeks to expound the proper understanding of this issue. In addition to this, He expounds the truth that was made clear in the previous section of verses about the falsehoods of the idolaters, such as their claim to worship the idols because these are representations of the angels—who, in turn, are the daughters of God—and that these can intercede for them with God, but this has been clearly and decisively refuted in the earlier verses of this chapter.

This section of verses also expounded the proper understanding of God's lordship and divinity, namely that creation and governance belong to God alone, and that everything ultimately devolves to Him. He created all that is created, and He governs all that is governed, so that there might follow a new creation, in which the disbeliever and the believer, and the sinner and the Godwary might be recompensed for their deeds. This, in accordance with the religion that He promulgated for humankind and the moral duties He imposed upon them. One of the signs of this is His destruction of earlier peoples who rebelled and disobeyed, such as the peoples of Noah, ʿĀd, Thamūd, and 'the town that was overturned.'

God then follows this, which He cites from the scriptures of Moses and Abraham, by calling attention to the fact that the Prophet is the last in a long line of warners and that the Hour is near at hand. Finally, He bids the listeners to prostrate to God and worship Him, and thereby draws the chapter to a close.

أَفَرَأَيْتَ الَّذِى تَوَلَّىٰ ﴿٣٣﴾ وَأَعْطَىٰ قَلِيلًا وَأَكْدَىٰ ﴿٣٤﴾

(53:33–34) ***So, did you see him who turned away, gave a little and held off* (akdā)*?***

Based on the context of the following verse, *turned away* here means to turn away from spending in the way of God; *gave* refers to spending in the way of God, and *akdā* ('held off') means to stop spending in God's way. Based on what we have already outlined, the preposition 'so' (*fa*) at the beginning of the verse shows that the content of these verses follows from the previous section.

Therefore, the meaning is as follows: 'So, tell me about the one who turned away from spending in the way of God, gave a little of his wealth, and then held off completely after that.'

أَعِنْدَهُ عِلْمُ الْغَيْبِ فَهُوَ يَرَىٰ ﴿٣٥﴾

(53:35) ***Does he have the knowledge of the Unseen so that he sees?***

The pronoun '*he*' that occurs in this verse refers to the one who turned away. This is a rhetorical question with the force of a denial. Therefore, the meaning is: 'Does he know the Unseen, such that he can know with certainty that his companion will bear his sins for him and be punished in his place on the Day of Resurrection if he is deserving of punishment?' This is how it has been explained by some commentators.

However, it seems that when the verse denies that this person has knowledge of the Unseen, this refers to knowledge about his future state in this world. In which case, the meaning becomes: 'Does he know the Unseen, such that he can know that if he spends in the way of God and continues to spend, his wealth will be used up and he will be afflicted by poverty?' As for the question of whether his companion can bear his sins for him, this is addressed in the subsequent verse, *that no bearer shall bear another's burden* (53:38).

أَمْ لَمْ يُنَبَّأْ بِمَا فِي صُحُفِ مُوسَىٰ ﴿٣٦﴾ وَإِبْرَاهِيمَ الَّذِي وَفَّىٰ ﴿٣٧﴾

(53:36–37) ***Has he not been informed of what is in the scriptures of Moses and of Abraham, who fulfilled:***

The scripture of Moses is the Torah, while the scripture of Abraham is whatever was sent down to him by God. The plural '*scriptures*' is used to show that there are a multitude of scriptures, consisting of many part.

'To fulfil' (*tawfiya*) means to deliver one's due completely and in full. Therefore, when the Qur'an says that Abraham *fulfilled*, this means that he

delivered what was due from him in terms of divine servanthood in the most complete way possible. See also the verse, *And when his Lord tested Abraham with certain words, and he fulfilled them* (2:124).

The words God quotes in the subsequent verses are drawn from the scriptures of Abraham and Moses. Now, while the Qur'an did not previously mention that the contents of these verses are from these previously, they have been mentioned in the form of aphorisms, admonitions, moral stories, and lessons. Therefore, the meaning of these two verses is: 'Or was the one who withheld spending in the way of God not aware that these matters were addressed in the scriptures of Abraham and Moses?'

أَلَّا تَزِرُ وَازِرَةٌ وِزْرَ أُخْرَىٰ ﴿٣٨﴾

(53:38) *that no bearer* (wāzira) *shall bear another's burden* (wizr)

The word *wizr* literally means 'a weight or load', but it is frequently used to signify 'sin.' *Wāzira* here refers to the soul that bears the sin of another.

This verse, and all of the seventeen subsequent verses that begin with *that...* or *and that...* is an exposition of the contents of the scriptures of Abraham and Moses.

Therefore, the meaning is: 'What their scriptures contain is that no soul shall bear the sin of another.' In other words, no soul shall be considered sinful for what another soul has done and no soul shall be punished for another soul's sins.

وَأَنْ لَيْسَ لِلْإِنْسَانِ إِلَّا مَا سَعَىٰ ﴿٣٩﴾

(53:39) *and that nothing belongs to man* (laysa li–l–insān) *except what he strives for* (mā saʿā).

According to al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī: 'To strive (*saʿī*) literally means to walk swiftly, but not to the extent that one could be said to be running. It is also used to signify earnestness in any act, whether good or evil. As God says, *and strives to ruin them* (2:114).' This latter meaning—to signify earnestness in an act—is figurative.

The *lām* in *laysa li-l-insān* denotes innate belonging (*al-mulk al-ḥaqīqī*), in the sense of something that is present with its owner so long as he exists and never departs him by its very nature. In this case, it is whatever righteous or unrighteous acts and good or evil deeds that a person earns while they are in this world. As for all the things that a person believes are his possessions by

virtue of his social reality, such as wealth, children, status, and the like thereof, these are merely trinkets and ornaments of this worldly life. All of these supposed possessions are only his as a matter of ephemeral social convention. If they remain with a person at all, it is only for so long as he inhabits this fleeting realm of delusion, and as soon as he wishes to move to the next life, he must leave them behind.

Therefore, the meaning of the verse is: 'And it is in the scriptures of Abraham and Moses that a person does not truly possess anything good or evil, or any benefit or harm, except what he strives for through his actions in this world. Therefore, he only has whatever he has done. Whatever someone else has done will have no positive or negative effect on him in the Hereafter.'

But what about the fact that those guilty of major sins may benefit from the intercession of intercessors on the Day of Resurrection? The intercession they receive is a result of their noble efforts, insofar as they entered the realm of faith in God and in His signs. The same is true of the believer who benefits for the prayers of others for his forgiveness after his death, or the good deeds whose rewards are gifted to him—all of these benefits are the result of him entering the ranks of the faithful, being a part of their community, and supporting their faith. And one of the results of this are the good deeds that he continues to benefit from after his death.

The same is also true of anyone who institutes a good practice (*sunna ḥasana*), for he shall have not only its reward but the reward of all of those who act upon it as well. By contrast, whoever institutes an evil practice, he shall bear its burden and the burden of all of those who act upon it until the Day of Judgement as well. This is because his efforts contributed to the actions of those who followed the practice that he instituted, as we have already discussed in our commentary on the verse, *Let those fear who, were they to leave behind weak offspring, would be concerned on their account* (4:9); and our commentary on the verse, *so that Allah may separate the bad ones from the good* (8:37), also contains some useful points in this regard.

وَأَنَّ سَعْيَهُ سَوْفَ يُرَىٰ ﴿٤٠﴾

(53:40) *and that he will soon be shown his endeavour*

His endeavour here refers to what he strove for through his deeds, and he will see these on the Day of Resurrection—as shown by the fact that the following verse mentions reward. Therefore, this verse is in the same vein as the verses, *The day when every soul will find present whatever good it has done; and*

as to whatever evil it has done... (3:30); and *On that day, mankind will issue forth in various groups to be shown their deeds. So whoever does an atom's weight of good will see it, and whoever does an atom's weight of evil will see it* (99:6–8).

The fact that the verb in the phrase, *he will soon be shown*, uses the passive voice carries with it the suggestion that there will be others beside him who see his deeds.

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ثُمَّ يُجْزَاهُ الْجَزَاءَ الْأَوْفَىٰ ﴿٤١﴾

(53:41) *then he will be rewarded for it with the fullest reward* (al–jazāʾ al–awfā);

The 'fullest' (*awfā*) here indicates that it will be delivered in full with all of its attributes, therefore this reward will be utterly complete.

The pronoun '*it*' in *he will be rewarded for it* refers to *his endeavour* in the previous verse. Therefore, the meaning of this verse is: 'Then the human being will be recompensed for his deeds with the most complete reward.'

وَأَنَّ إِلَىٰ رَبِّكَ الْمُنْتَهَىٰ ﴿٤٢﴾

(53:42) *and that the terminus* (muntahā) *is toward your Lord*

The word *muntahā* is an m-infinitive (*maṣdar mīmī*) meaning 'the end or limit of something.' Here, it is used in an absolutely general sense, referring to all endings. Therefore, there is no entity that exists save that its existence and the effects of its existence ultimately devolve to and end with God, whether directly or indirectly. Equally, there is no affair pertaining to the governance and order of the cosmos, whether universal or particular, save that it devolves to Him. After all, there is no organization or order between existing things save by virtue of the connections that exist between them, and the Originator of all things is also the Originator of the connections between them. Therefore, God Almighty is the ultimate end of all things. As God says elsewhere, *Allah is creator of all things, and He watches over all things. To Him belong the keys of the heavens and the earth* (39:62–63); *Look! All creation and command belong to Him* (7:54).

This verse establishes God's absolute lordship over all things, in as much as the governance of existence and of all existent beings devolves to Him, and all things begin with Him—the Originator—and end with Him by returning to Him via the Resurrection.

From the above, the weakness of the following interpretation of the verse

becomes clear, namely that it merely refers to the fact that the creation will return to Him on the Day of Resurrection. The same is true of the interpretation that says it means that God's reward and punishment are the ultimate outcome, or that it means His judgement is the ultimate outcome for all mankind, or that it means He is beyond the limitations of all thoughts and ideas. These interpretations are all weak because they restrict the scope of the verse's meaning without any textual reason to do so.

وَأَنَّهُ هُوَ أَضْحَكَ وَأَبْكَىٰ ﴿٤٣﴾

(53:43) ***and that it is He who makes laugh and makes weep***

The twelve remaining verses beginning with this one are all examples to show what is meant by the creation and governance of the cosmos ending with God Almighty.

Furthermore, the tone of all of these verses is one of exclusivity. This is to convey the exclusivity of lordship to Him and to negate any notion of a partner or an equal. However, none of these instances of exclusivity preclude the role of intermediary causes—whether physical or metaphysical—such as the role of emotions such as happiness or sadness in causing a person to laugh or cry, not to mention the various organs involved in both of these acts. Equally, there is nothing to say that there are not physical or metaphysical processes involved in giving life and causing death, the creation of males and females, enriching and granting possessions, or destroying past nations. This is because all of these processes and intermediate causes are ultimately subject to the commands of God and do not operate independently or separately from His will. Their existence, their actions, and their effects are all ultimately determined by God, and no other being has a share in this.

Therefore, when God says, *and that it is He who makes laugh and makes weep*, this means that He—and no other—is the one who causes laughter in the one who laughs and tears in the one who weeps.

There is no contradiction between saying that God is the ultimate cause of the existence of laughter and tears and attributing these to a person as well. This is because an action belongs to a human being insofar as the action exists through him, while an action belongs to God insofar as He is the ultimate originator of all things—and what a difference there is between these two propositions!

Just because the divine will is fixed upon a person laughing, for example, this does not negate the role of the human being's own choice in their laughter

or mean that their free will has no influence. This is because the divine will is not fixed upon laughter in the abstract sense, without regard for particularities. On the contrary, the divine will is fixed upon laughter that takes place as a result of human choice, insofar as the human being wants to laugh. Therefore, the decision of the human being to laugh is a cause for their laughter, and this cause is part and parcel of the divine will. It is not separate or apart from it, such that there could be any conflict or contradiction between the two. We do not need to say that volitional human acts are created by God and that the person plays no role in occasioning them—which is the position of the determinists (*jābira*)—or that these acts are created by the human being and God has nothing to do with them—which is the position of the Mu'tazila.

From the above, the error of the following interpretations becomes clear: That the verse indicates that God created the faculties of laughter and tears; or that He created the feelings of happiness and sadness; or that He caused the ground to metaphorically 'laugh' through plants coming forth and the sky to 'weep' by causing it to rain; or that He causes the inhabitants of paradise to laugh and the inhabitants of hell to weep.

وَأَنَّهُ هُوَ أَمَاتَ وَأَحْيَا ﴿٤٤﴾

(53:44) ***and that it is He who brings death and gives life***

The discussion of the role of physical and metaphysical agents other than God—such as the angels—in bringing about life and death is the same as the role of intermediate causes in bringing about laughter and tears, in as much the ultimate origin of all of these things is only God, even while other agents may play a role within the scope of the divine will. The same is true of all the other phenomena mentioned in the subsequent verses.

وَأَنَّهُ خَلَقَ الزَّوْجَيْنِ الذَّكَرَ وَالْأُنْثَىٰ ﴿٤٥﴾ مِنْ نُطْفَةٍ إِذَا تُمْنَىٰ ﴿٤٦﴾

(53:45–46) ***and that it is He who created the mates, the male and the female, from a drop of fluid*** **(nuṭfa)** ***when emitted;***

The word *nuṭfa* ('drop of fluid') signifies the seed of both the man and the woman, from which is created a child. The male 'emits' his seed when he ejaculates.

The male and the female is an exposition of *the mates*.

Some commentators have pointed out that, in the previous verses, the clause *it is He* is phrased in Arabic *wa anna-hu huwa* ('and it is he alone

who…'), whereas in this verse it is only *wa anna-hu* ('and it is he…'). They say this shift is to emphasise that it is inconceivable that anyone else could be credited with creating males and females other than Him.

وَأَنَّ عَلَيْهِ النَّشْأَةَ الْأُخْرَىٰ ﴿٤٧﴾

(53:47) ***and that with Him lies the second genesis***

The second genesis (*al-nash'a al-ukhrā*) means the new creation that will take place in the Hereafter, where the recompense will take place. It '*lies*' with Him in the sense that it is part of His irrevocable will (*qaḍā' al-ḥatm*) as He has promised that it will take place and described Himself by saying that He does not break His promises.[1]

وَأَنَّهُ هُوَ أَغْنَىٰ وَأَقْنَىٰ ﴿٤٨﴾

(53:48) ***and that it is He who enriches*** **(aghnā)** ***and grants possessions*** **(aqnā).**

The verb *aghnā* is derived from *ghinā* ('wealth'), meaning 'it is He who grants wealth.'

The verb *aqnā* is derived from *qunya* ('possessions'), which signifies specifically those possessions which are lasting and durable, such as a home, an orchard, or an animal. Therefore, God mentions possessions after wealth to call attention to their value and importance.

Some have said that *aghnā* means to be granted wealth and *aqnā* means to be made content with it. Others have said that *aqnā* is the opposite of *aghnā*, so as to render the meaning 'it is He who enriches and impoverishes.'

وَأَنَّهُ هُوَ رَبُّ الشِّعْرَىٰ ﴿٤٩﴾

(53:49) ***and that it is He who is the Lord of Sirius.***

Sirius is a bright star on the eastern horizon, near the constellation of Orion.

Some have said that the Khuzā'a and Ḥimyar tribes used to worship this star, and that one of the maternal ancestors of the Prophet, Abū Kabsha, was a worshipper of it. The idolaters would refer to him as 'the son of Abū Kabsha'

1 See the verse, *Our Lord! You will indeed gather mankind on a day in which there is no doubt. Indeed Allah does not break His promise* (3:9). (Trans.)

(Ibn Abī Kabsha) because he had contravened their religious traditions, just as Abū Kabsha had contravened those of his people by worshipping Sirius.

وَأَنَّهُ أَهْلَكَ عَادًا الْأُولَىٰ ﴿٥٠﴾

(53:50) ***and that it is He who destroyed the former ʿĀd***

ʿĀd are the people of the Prophet Hūd, and they are described as '*the former*' because there was another people of the same name who came after them.

وَثَمُودَ فَمَا أَبْقَىٰ ﴿٥١﴾

(53:51) ***and Thamūd, sparing none;***

Thamūd are the people of the Prophet Ṣāliḥ, the disbelievers of whom God extirpated in their entirety. This is what He alludes to with the phrase, *sparing none* (*fa mā abqā*). However, He did save the faithful amongst them from destruction, as per the verse, *And We delivered those who had faith and were Godwary* (41:18).

وَقَوْمَ نُوحٍ مِنْ قَبْلُ ۖ إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا هُمْ أَظْلَمَ وَأَطْغَىٰ ﴿٥٢﴾

(53:52) ***and the people of Noah before that; indeed they were more unjust and rebellious;***

The '*and*' at the beginning of this verse, like the one before it, connects it to *the former ʿĀd*. When God says that they were *more unjust and rebellious*, based on the context, this means in relation to both of the aforementioned peoples of ʿĀd and Thamūd. The reason they were *more unjust and rebellious* is that they did not respond positively to Noah's call or pay attention to his preaching, even though he was amongst them for close to a thousand years, and only a handful of them ultimately believed in him.

وَالْمُؤْتَفِكَةَ أَهْوَىٰ ﴿٥٣﴾ فَغَشَّاهَا مَا غَشَّىٰ ﴿٥٤﴾

(53:53–54) ***and He overthrew the town that was overturned covering it with what covered it***

Some commentators have said that *the town that was overturned* refers to the people of Lot, whose habitation was turned upside down with them inside it.

The meaning of these verses is as follows: 'And He cast down the town

that was overturned by capsizing it and swallowing it with the earth, then it was encompassed and consumed by whatever punishment encompassed and consumed it.'

However, it is also possible that the phrase *the town that was overturned* is more general in meaning than the town of Lot's people and that it refers to every town that was beset by divine punishment and whose people perished, leaving behind only empty ruins fallen upon their trellises.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكَ تَتَمَارَىٰ ﴿٥٥﴾

(53:55) ***Then which of the bounties*** **(ālāʾ)** ***of your Lord will you dispute*** **(tatamārī)*?***

Ālāʾ ('bounties') is the plural of *ilan*, meaning 'blessing.'

Tamārī ('dispute') means 'to doubt.'

This question is presented as a conclusion to the acts of God described above.

Therefore, the meaning of the verse is: 'When God is the one who arranged this wondrous cosmic order, causing laughter and tears, death and life, creation and destruction, and so on, then which of your Lord's blessings will you doubt or dispute about?'

Note that this verse counts tears, death, and the destruction of sinful peoples to be blessings from God. This is because they all play a role in the perfect order that God has instituted in the world, and each of them contributes to the flourishing of the creation and the return of all things back to God.

This verse is addressed either to the man who *turned away, gave a little and held off* (53:33–34) mentioned at the beginning of this section or to the Prophet. If it is addressed to the Prophet it is a form of indirect address to those around him. Moreover, this question is rhetorical in nature, intended to be heard as a denial.

هَٰذَا نَذِيرٌ مِّنَ النُّذُرِ الْأُولَىٰ ﴿٥٦﴾

(53:56) ***This is a warner*** **(nadhīr)** ***of the warners*** **(nudhur)** ***of old.***

It is said that the word '*warner*' here is being used in the sense of 'warning' and that the word *nudhuri* can be both a plural of both meanings. Therefore, the warner mentioned here is either the Qur'an or the Prophet.

أَزِفَتِ الْآزِفَةُ ﴿٥٧﴾

(53:57) ***The Imminent is near at hand.***

In other words, the Resurrection is soon to take place—'*The Imminent*' (*al-Āzifa*) is one of the names of the Resurrection. See the verse, *Warn them of the Imminent Day* (40:18).

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لَيْسَ لَهَا مِنْ دُونِ اللَّهِ كَاشِفَةٌ ﴿٥٨﴾

(53:58) ***There is none that may draw it back*** **(kāshifa)** ***besides Allah***

The meaning of '*draw it back*' here is to alleviate the terrors and hardships it contains.

Therefore, the meaning is: 'No soul can alleviate the terrors and hardships it contains save that God draws them back.'

أَفَمِنْ هَٰذَا الْحَدِيثِ تَعْجَبُونَ ﴿٥٩﴾ وَتَضْحَكُونَ وَلَا تَبْكُونَ ﴿٦٠﴾ وَأَنْتُمْ سَامِدُونَ ﴿٦١﴾

(53:59–61) ***Do you then wonder at this discourse, and laugh and not weep, while you remain heedless*** **(sāmidūn)***?*

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This discourse refers to the exposition presented above.

Sāmidūn ('heedless') is derived from *samūd*, meaning 'diversion.'

These verses are presented as another conclusion drawn from the exposition of the above verses, and the question is once again rhetorical, but this time intended as a rebuke.

The meaning of these verses is: 'When God is your Lord, with whom all matters ultimately terminate, upon whom is the new creation; and when the Resurrection is near at hand and there is none who can alleviate it except God, you should surely weep for the blessings of God that have escaped you already and for exposing yourselves to eternal misery. Are you astonished by this discourse that calls you to salvation? Will you deny it? Will you laugh at it in mockery? Will you not weep?'

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فَاسْجُدُوا لِلَّهِ وَاعْبُدُوا ﴿٦٢﴾

(53:62) ***So prostrate yourselves to Allah and worship Him!***

This is yet another conclusion drawn from the above exposition. It means: 'If this is the case, you should surely bow down before God and worship Him

that He might relieve you of that which none can alleviate except Him!'

Examining Narrations

(1) In *al-Kashshāf*, about the verse, *So, did you see him who turned away...?* (53:33), al-Zamakhsharī narrates that ʿUthmān used to spend his wealth on good causes, then his milk-brother ʿAbd Allāh b. Saʿd b. Abī Sarḥ told him, 'Soon you will have naught left!'

ʿUthmān said, 'I have sins and misdeeds, and by doing this I intend to win God's favor and hope for His forgiveness.'

ʿAbd Allāh said, 'Give me your she-camel with her saddle and I will bear all of your sins for you.'

So he gave him what he asked for, took an oath from him, and then desisted from giving charity. Then this verse was revealed. The meaning of *turned away* (*tawallā*) is that he fled from battle on the Day of Uḥud, but ʿUthmān redeemed himself and attained a better and more honourable standing than that.

Author's comments: The same story appears in *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, where it is attributed to Ibn ʿAbbās, al-Sudayy, al-Kalbī, and a group of Qur'an commentators. However, there is a problem with connecting the phrase *turned away* to the Battle of Uḥud, as these verses were revealed in Mecca, before any battles had yet taken place.

(2) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, al-Fāryābī, ʿAbd b. Ḥamīd, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn Mundhir, and Ibn Abī Ḥātim narrate from Mujāhid, about the verse, *So, did you see him who turned away*: 'It refers to al-Walīd b. al-Mughīra. He would come to the Prophet and Abū Bakr and listen to what they said. That is what he "gave" from himself, he "gave" his attention. Then he *held off*, by ceasing to give his attention. About this, the verse was then revealed, *Does he have the knowledge of the Unseen...?* (53:35). '*The Unseen*' refers to the Qur'an, it means: "Did he find some falsehood in it with his perception when he used to come to the Prophet and Abū Bakr?"'

Author's comments: It should be evident to the reader that the apparent meaning of these verses does not match the contents of this tradition.

It is also narrated that this verse was revealed about al-ʿĀṣ b. Wā'il, or about a man whose name is not mentioned.

(3) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, concerning the verse, *and of Abraham, who fulfilled* (53:37), we read: 'He fulfilled the commands and prohibitions God addressed to him and the order to slaughter his son.'

(4) In *al-Kāfī*, al-Kulaynī narrates via a chain of narrators from Isḥāq b. ʿAmmār from Imām al-Kāẓim: 'I asked him about a man who performs the Ḥajj and dedicates his Ḥajj and ʿUmra, or at least some of his circumambulation, to one of his relatives while they are far away in another land... does that diminish his reward in the least? He told me: "He shall have its full reward, and his comrade will receive their full reward, and he will have a reward besides that based on what has been conveyed (to his companion.)" I asked: "If his companion is deceased, will they still receive it?" He said: "Yes, even if he is one with whom God is displeased, he will be forgiven... or if his grave is narrow around him, it will be opened up for him." I asked: "And in that state, will he know that this was done for him?" He said: "Yes." I asked: "And even if he is an enemy of the Prophet's Household (*nāṣib*)?" He said: "Yes, his punishment will be lessened."'

Author's comments: Note that the subject of this narration is not performing acts of worship on behalf of the deceased, but rather gifting the reward of acts of worship to them.

(5) In the same source, al-Kulaynī narrates via a chain from ʿAbd Allāh b. Sinān, from Imām al-Ṣādiq, that the Messenger of God said: 'When a believer falls ill, God Almighty will tell the Angel that was appointed to watch over him, "Write for him the same reward that you would write for him when he was healthy, for I am the one who has put him under My protection.'

(6) In *al-Khiṣāl*, Shaykh al-Ṣadūq narrates from Imām al-Ṣādiq: 'No reward reaches a man after his death except for three things: An continuous charity that he set in motion in his lifetime,which will continue after his death until the Day of Resurrection, that is a charity that he has established as a bequest (*waqf*) that is not inherited by his heirs; or a good practice (*sunna*) that he used to undertake and that others after him have also adopted; or a righteous descendant who pleads to God for his forgiveness.'

Author's comments: These three narrations—and there are very many others from the Imāms of the Prophet's Household with the same meaning—expand the meaning of *what he strives for* in the verse, *and that nothing belongs to man except what he strives for* (53:39), as we have already discussed.

(7) In *Uṣūl al-Kāfī*, al-Kulaynī narrates via a chain from Sulaymān b. Khālid that Imām al-Ṣādiq said: 'Indeed God says, *and that the terminus is toward your Lord* (53:42), meaning that when the topic of

discussion comes to the nature of God, you should stay quiet.'

Author's comments: This tradition also expands the meaning of 'terminus' (*muntahā*) in the verse.

(8) In the same source, al-Kulaynī narrates via chain of narrations from Abū 'Ubayda al-Hadhdhā' that Imām al-Bāqir said: 'O Ziyād, beware of debates, for they engender doubt, cause good works to fail, and immiserate the one who engages in them. Perhaps he will say something for which God will not forgive him. In the past, there were a people who forsook the knowledge with which they had been entrusted and instead sought knowledge that was of no avail to them. This reached a point when their discussions came to the nature of God, and they were so confused that if one of them was called from the front, he would turn around to look at those behind him, and if he was called from behind, he would respond to those in front.' There is another narration that says: 'Until they were set wandering across the earth.'

In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, al-Suyūṭī narrates from Abū al-Shaykh, from Abū Dharr, that the Messenger of God said: 'Contemplate God's creation but do not contemplate God's essence, or else you will perish!'

Author's comments: There are many other narrations that prohibit contemplating God's essence that can be found in both Sunnī and Shī'ī collections of traditions. However, these prohibitions are actually intended as guidance (*irshād*) for those who are not equipped to delve into deep philosophical issues and, as a result, risk eternal misery by doing so.

(9) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, concerning the verse, *and that it is He who makes laugh and makes weep* (53:43): 'He makes the sky weep with rain and the earth laugh with vegetation.'

Author's comments: This expands the meaning of weeping and laughing beyond the literal.

(10) In *Ma'ānī al-akhbār*, al-Ṣadūq narrates via a chain going back to al-Sukūnī, from Imām al-Ṣādiq, from his forefathers, from the Commander of the Faithful, concerning the verse, *and that it is He who enriches and grants possessions* (53:53): 'He enriches each person with their livelihood, and makes them satisfied with what their hands have earned.'

(11) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, concerning the verse, *and that it is He who is the Lord of Sirius* (53:49): 'The star in the heavens that is named Sirius was worshipped by the Quraysh and some of the Arabs. It is a star

that appears at the end of the night.'

Author's comments: It appears that when he says that it appears at the end of the night, this is based on the time of year when this tradition was originally spoken, which would have been in summertime, as Sirius appears throughout the hours of the night.

(12) In the same source, concerning the verse, *The Imminent is near at hand* (53:57): 'The Day of Resurrection has drawn year.'

(13) In *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, concerning the verse, *Do you then wonder at this discourse* (53:59), we read: 'The discourse in question are the reports we have presented here.'

(14) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, it is narrated from Ibn Mardawayh, from Ibn ʿAbbās: 'After the verse was revealed to the Prophet, *Do you then wonder at this discourse, and laugh and not weep,* He was never seen to laugh again until he departed from this world.'

End of Chapter 53

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Chapter 54

Sūrah al–Qamar ('The Moon')

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بِسْمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحْمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the most Merciful, the most Compassionate

Verses 1–8

This chapter of the Qur'an is focused purely on divine threats and warnings, save for its final two verses that contain glad tidings of paradise and nearness to their Lord for the Godwary.

The chapter begins by calling attention to the miraculous splitting of the moon brought about by the Prophet at the demands of his people. It mentions that they accused him of being a magician, they denied his prophethood, and followed their own desires in spite of the dire warnings he brought to them about the Day of Judgement and the fates of past nations that had perished due to God's punishment. Then, God calls attention to these accounts in a wrathful and reproachful tone and foretells the evil fate that awaits them on the Day of Resurrection when they are brought forth from their graves and mustered for the final judgement.

Then, the chapter turns to the story of the people of Noah, ʿĀd, Thamūd, Lot, and Pharaoh and the terrible punishments that befell them because they denied the warnings they were given, before saying that the people of the Prophet are no mightier in relation to God than they had been and have no power to thwart God's will. The chapter concludes by giving glad tidings to the faithful.

Based on the tone and context of its verses, this chapter is of Meccan provenance. The theory that it was revealed at Badr should be discounted, as should the theory that some of its verses were revealed in Medina. Some of its most beautiful verses are the signs of God's power invoked towards its end.

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اقْتَرَبَتِ السَّاعَةُ وَانْشَقَّ الْقَمَرُ ﴿١﴾

(54:1) ***The Hour has drawn near*** **(iqtarab)** ***and the moon is split***

The verb *iqtarab* means to become extremely close. Therefore, when God says, *the Hour has drawn near*, He means that it is imminent indeed. The Hour is, of course, the time at which the Resurrection takes place.

... and the moon is split: Meaning, that it has been separated into two parts, as indicated. This verse refers to the miraculous splitting of the moon that God caused to happen at the hand of His Prophet in Mecca before the Emigration in response to the demands of the Meccan idolaters. There are abundant narrations that detail this, and both the scholars of traditions and Qur'anic commentary are in agreement about their authenticity. None of them have differed in this regard except al-Ḥasan, 'Aṭā', and al-Balkhī, who have argued that *and the moon is split* refers to the moon splitting when the Hour sets in. They say that this sentence is phrased in the past tense to show the certainty with which it will occur.

However, this view is bogus and refuted by the contents of the subsequent verse, *If they see a sign, they turn away, and say, 'An incessant magic!'* (54:2), and its context is the clearest evidence that the term *sign* here is general in meaning, referring to any miracle, and includes the splitting of the moon. However, when this occurs, the idolaters turn away and say: 'An incessant magic!' This is obviously not something they can say on the Day of Resurrection, the day on which all realities become manifest and humankind will pursue knowledge in order to seek refuge in it. On that day, it would be meaningless for them to say that the splitting of the moon was 'incessant magic.' Therefore, there is no other possibility save that this was a miracle that occurred to show the truth and veracity of the Prophet's claims but that, when it was shown to them, they accused him of practicing magic out of their obstinate disbelief.

Equally incorrect is the view that says the verse is a reference to the recent claims of scientists that the moon was originally a part of the earth and the earth was originally part of the sun, and that each of these split off from the other. According to them, the phrase, *the moon is split* is a reference to this scientific fact that was unknown to people at the time of revelation. However, even if this theory is correct, it does not accord with the subsequent verse about the reaction of the idolaters, *If they see a sign, they turn away, and say, 'An incessant magic!'* as none of them are recorded as saying that the moon itself was an incessant magic. Moreover, this scientific theory talks about the moon becoming separated from the earth, while the verse is talking about the moon itself splitting into two, as the verb *inshiqāq* is only used when something splits apart by itself, not when it becomes separated from something else having previously been a part thereof.

Another incorrect view is the claim that the splitting of the moon refers to the darkness being banished when it rises, and still another is the claim that the splitting of the moon is a metaphor for the truth becoming manifest and God's command being triumphant.

Moreover, the verse hints subtly at the fact that the splitting of the moon is an inevitable part of the Hour drawing near.

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وَإِنْ يَرَوْا آيَةً يُعْرِضُوا وَيَقُولُوا سِحْرٌ مُسْتَمِرٌّ ﴿٢﴾

(54:2) ***If they see a sign*** **(āya)*****, they turn away, and say, 'An incessant magic*** **(siḥr mustamirr)*****!'***

The adjective *mustamirr* (incessant) is derived from *istimrār*, which means for something to go on and on continuously without stopping. Therefore, it is used for something that does not cease. Therefore, *'An incessant magic'* means that there has been one magic trick after another.

Here, the word *āya* (sign) is indefinite, which conveys a sense of generality and gives it the meaning of 'every sign that they witness, they claim it is just another magic trick. Some have said that the adjective *mustamirr* can also mean 'permanent' or 'stable', others interpret it as meaning 'ephemeral' or 'fleeting', and others still argue that it means 'repugnant' or 'offensive.' However, all of these interpretations are far from the term's apparent meaning.

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وَكَذَّبُوا وَاتَّبَعُوا أَهْوَاءَهُمْ ۚ وَكُلُّ أَمْرٍ مُسْتَقِرٌّ ﴿٣﴾

(54:3) ***They denied, and followed their own desires, and every matter has a setting***

What did they deny? The end of the verse suggests that it was the Prophet and the signs that he brought. In other words, 'they denied the Prophet and the signs that he brought them, when the fact is that every matter has a place in which it will settle, and then it will be known whether it is true or false, veracious or deceitful. Then, they will know whether the Prophet spoke the truth or not, and whether he was upon the truth or not.' Therefore, the phrase *every matter has a setting* should be understood in the same vein as the verse, *and you will surely learn its tidings in due time* (38:88).

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Some have said that what they denied was, in fact, the splitting of the moon. Therefore, the meaning of the verse is: 'They denied the splitting of the moon and followed their own desires.' However, the end of the verse, *and every matter has a setting*, does not accord with this meaning at all.

وَلَقَدْ جَاءَهُمْ مِنَ الْأَنْبَاءِ مَا فِيهِ مُزْدَجَرٌ ﴿٤﴾

(54:4) *There have already come to them reports containing admonishment* (muzdajar)

The term *muzdajar* is an M-infinitive (*maṣdar mīmī*) that means to caution someone, these *reports* (*anbā'*) are either the accounts of earlier nations whom God destroyed or prophecies about the Day of Resurrection—both interpretations are equally possible. The fact that the verse is followed by reports about the Day of Resurrection then reports about a number of nations who perished as a result of divine punishment suggests that the phrase *reports containing admonishment*, in fact, refers to both of these meanings simultaneously.

حِكْمَةٌ بَالِغَةٌ ۖ فَمَا تُغْنِ النُّذُرُ ﴿٥﴾

(54:5) *far-reaching wisdom* (ḥikma bāligha)*; but warnings are of no avail!*

Ḥikma ('wisdom') signifies a true statement that is also beneficial, while the adjective *bāligha* ('far-reaching') is derived from *bulūgh*, which literally means for something to arrive at its destination, but can also be used figuratively to denote the fullness or perfection of a thing. Therefore, *far-reaching wisdom* means complete and perfect wisdom that is without deficiency or deficit, whether in of its own self or with regard to its effect.

...but warners* (nudhur) *are of no avail! The word *nudhur* is the plural of *nadhīr*, meaning either 'someone who brings a warning' or 'warning' in the abstract sense. However, it is the first meaning that is more easily understood in this context.

Therefore, the meaning of the verse is: This Qur'an (or the message to which they are being called) is *far-reaching wisdom*, but they denied it and followed their own desires, so what avail are warners or warnings?

فَتَوَلَّ عَنْهُمْ ۘ يَوْمَ يَدْعُ الدَّاعِ إِلَىٰ شَيْءٍ نُكُرٍ ﴿٦﴾

(54:6) *So turn away from them* (fa tawalla ʿanhum)*! The day when the Caller calls to a dire thing*

The *fa* in *fa tawalla* shows that this command is based on the description of their state given above. In other words: 'Given that they deny your

prophethood and follow their own desires, no amount of warnings will avail them nor will any amount of admonition effect them, so turn away from them and do not repeat your call to them.'

The day when the Caller calls to a dire thing (shay' nukur)—al-Rāghib says: '*Inkār* (denial) is the opposite of *'irfān* (acknowledgement). One might say *ankartu kadhā* ('I deny such and such') or *nakartu* ('I deny it'). In its original sense, it means that something enters the heart that the heart does not recognise, and this is a kind of ignorance. The Qur'an says (about Abraham), *But when he saw their hands not reaching for it, he took them amiss* (11:70). The word *nukur* can also mean 'cleverness' or something that is difficult to comprehend.'

The phrase, *So turn away from them* is the final word on the state of the deniers in relation to the far-reaching wisdom that has been presented to them and the admonitions addressed to them as a warning. Then God repeated some of these admonitions, which are accounts of what their condition will be on the Day of Resurrection and the fates of those earlier nations who denied their prophets. In doing so, He employs a harshly rebuking tone that inspires fear in the hearts in order to grab their attention and deprive them of any excuses, to justify His command to His Prophet to turn away from them.

Therefore, the phrase, *The day when the Caller calls*, is a new statement, separate from what came before it—as indicated by the previously mentioned admonitions—and it is phrased as an answer to a question that is implicit in the command, *So turn away from them*. So, for instance, someone might ask: 'What will be become of them?' The answer is: *The day when the Caller calls...*—in other words, this will be their condition in their afterlife, this is the consequence of the worldly lives lived by those like them and those in whose footsteps they follow from the peoples of Noah, 'Ād, Thamūd, and others, who they are not better than.

Based on this, the adverbial phrase, *The day when...*, qualifies the verse, *they will emerge from the graves...* Hence, the meaning is as follows: 'They will emerge from the graves on the day when the Caller calls to a dire thing...' Alternatively, it could be read as meaning, 'And mention *the day when the Caller calls...*' In other words, 'mention that day and their condition on that day...' This renders the meaning of this verse in the same vein as the verses, *Do they await anything but that the Hour should overtake them suddenly, while they are unaware?* (43:66) and *Do they await anything except the like of the days of those who passed away before them?* (10:102).

Why does God not specify the identity of this caller? Elsewhere in the

Qur'an, He has ascribed this call to Himself: *The day He calls you, you will respond to Him, praising Him* (17:52).

The reason why God describes their experience of the Resurrection here—their being called forth and emerging from their graves with fear and anxiety in their eyes and scrambling towards the one who has summoned them to face their Final Judgement—is to draw a parallel with their being called to faith in this life through God's signs, which they turn away from and dismiss as 'incessant magic.'

Therefore, the meaning of the verse is: 'Recall the day on which the Caller will summon them for an affair that will be difficult for them, namely the judgement and recompense of the Hereafter.'

خُشَّعًا أَبْصَارُهُمْ يَخْرُجُونَ مِنَ الْأَجْدَاثِ كَأَنَّهُمْ جَرَادٌ مُنْتَشِرٌ ﴿٧﴾

(54:7) ***with a humbled look*** **(khushshaʿan abṣāruhum)*, they will emerge from the graves*** **(ajdāth)** ***as if they were scattered locusts,***

The word *khushshaʿ* is the plural of *khāshiʿ* ('one who is humbled and fearful'), which is derived from *khushūʿ*, which denotes a kind of humility. This is attributed to their sights (*abṣār*) because that is where this fear is most apparent.

Ajdāth ('graves') is the plural of *jadath*, which is synonymous with *qabr* ('grave'). They are compared to scattered locusts (*jarād muntashir*) when emerging from their resting places because when locusts swarm they mix together and crawl over one another in all directions. Those emerging from their graves on the Day of Resurrection will do likewise, as God says in Sūrah al-Maʿārij, *the day when they emerge from the graves, hastening, as if racing toward a target, with a humbled look, overcast by abasement. That is the day they had been promised* (70:43–44).

مُهْطِعِينَ إِلَى الدَّاعِ ۖ يَقُولُ الْكَافِرُونَ هَٰذَا يَوْمٌ عَسِرٌ ﴿٨﴾

(54:8) ***scrambling toward the summoner. The faithless will say, 'This is a hard day!'***

In other words, while they are all clambering over one another in a rush to respond to the one who has called them forth, the faithless will say, 'This is a most difficult day!'

Examining Narrations

(1) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, about the verse, *The Hour has drawn near* (54:1), we read: 'The Resurrection is imminent, for there is nothing after the Messenger of God except the Resurrection, and both prophethood and messengership have come to an end. As for the verse, *and the moon is split* (54:2), the Quraysh had asked the Messenger of God to show them a sign, so he invoked God to split the moon into two halves so that they might see it clearly. But when He did, they said: "*An incessant magic!*" Meaning "a genuine magic."'

(2) In the *Amālī* of Shaykh al-Mufīd, via a chain of narrators from ʿUbayd Allāh b. ʿAlī, from Imām al-Riḍā, from his forefathers, from ʿAlī, it is related: 'In Mecca, the moon split into two parts. When this happened, God's Messenger said, "Bear witness! Bear witness!"'

(3) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, ʿAbd al-Razzāq, Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, ʿAbd b. Ḥumayd, Muslim, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn al-Mundhir, al-Tirmidhī, Ibn Mardawayh, and al-Bayhaqī in his *Dalā'il* narrate from Anas: 'The people of Mecca asked the Prophet for a sign, so he split the moon in twain in Mecca, then the verse was revealed, *The Hour has drawn near and the moon is split… say, "An incessant magic!"*'

(4) In the same source, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn al-Mundhir, Ibn Mardawayh, Abū Naʿīm, and al-Bayhaqī—both of them in the *Dalā'il*—relate via Masrūq from Ibn Masʿūd: 'The moon split during the time of the Prophet, but the Quraysh said, "This is the sorcery of Ibn Abī Kabsha! Wait and see what word the Saffār tribe bring you, for Muḥammad cannot bewitch all of humankind." The Saffār tribe came, the people asked them about it, and they said: "Yes, we saw it too!" Whereat God sent down the verse, *The Hour has drawn near and the moon is split*.'

(5) In the same source, Muslim, al-Tirmidhī, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn al-Mundhir, Ibn Mardawah, al-Ḥākim, al-Bayhaqī, and Abū Naʿīm in his *Dalā'il* narrate via Mujāhid from Ibn ʿUmar, concerning the verse, *The Hour has drawn near and the moon is split*: 'That happened during the time of God's Messenger. It split into two parts: One in front of the mountain and one behind it. Whereat the Prophet proclaimed: "O God, bear witness!"'

(6) In the same source, Aḥmad, ʿAbd b. Ḥumayd, al-Tirmidhī, Ibn Jarīr, al-Ḥākim, Abū Naʿīm, and al-Bayhaqī narrate from Jubayr

b. Muṭʿim, concerning the verse, *the moon is split*: 'The moon split while we were in Mecca during the time of the Messenger of God. It broke into two pieces: One was above this mountain and the other was above that one. People said, "Muḥammad has bewitched us!" But a man said, "Even if he has bewitched you, he could not bewitch all mankind!"'

(7) In the same source, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn Mardawayh, and Abū Naʿīm in the *Dalā'il* narrate from Ibn ʿAbbās concerning the verse, *The Hour has drawn near and the moon is split*: 'That happened before the Emigration. The moon split such that we could visibly see it in two parts.'

(8) In the same source, Ibn Abī Shayba, ʿAbd b. Ḥumayd, ʿAbd Allāh b. Aḥmad in the *Zawā'id al-zuhd*, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn Mardawayh, and Abū Naʿīm narrate from Abī ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Sulamī: 'Hudhayfa b. al-Yamān delivered a sermon to us in Madā'in. He praised and magnified God, then said: "*The Hour has drawn near and the moon is split*"—Lo! Surely the Hour has drawn nigh! Lo! And surely the moon has split during the time of the Messenger of God! Lo! And surely the world has announced its imminent departure! Lo! Surely today is the race track and tomorrow is the race!"

Author's comments: The splitting of the moon occurred due to the supplication of the Prophet is an event that has been narrated through many different paths from these individuals among the companions, namely Anas, ʿAbd Allah b. Masʿūd, Ibn ʿUmar, Jubayr b. Muṭʿim, Ibn ʿAbbās, Hudhayfa b. al-Yamān. It is mentioned in *Rūḥ al-maʿānī* that the tradition was narrated by the companions from ʿAlī. It is related by al-Sayyid al-Sharīf in his commentary on the *Mawaqif* and Ibn al-Subkī in his commentary on the *Mukhtasar* that the tradition is widely transmitted (*mutawātir*) and there is no doubt concerning its transmission. This is the status of the tradition among the Sunnīs, and readers will already be well-aware of its status among the Shīʿa.

A Discourse on the Miraculous Splitting of the Moon

The Prophet's miracle of splitting the moon took place in Mecca before the Emigration in response to the demands of the idolaters. This is something accepted by all Muslims without doubt.

The Qur'an refers to this momentous event in the opening verses of the present chapter, *The Hour has drawn near and the moon is split. If they see a sign, they turn away, and say, 'An incessant magic!'* (54:1–2). The latter of the

two verses can only be concerning this event, and suggests that this chapter was revealed shortly after the event it references, because it refers to the fact that the idolaters turned away from this miracle (as they did for all signs and miracles), and derided it as '*incessant magic*.' This is further confirmed by the abundant traditions and narrations found in both Sunnī and Shīʿī sources concerning the event that are accepted by the scholars of traditions. We have presented some examples of these traditions above.

Therefore, both the Qur'an and the traditions refer to this event. Now, the splitting of a heavenly body is something that is possible in of itself, and there is nothing rationally impossible about it. As we have already discussed extensively in the first volume of this commentary, supernatural events—such as signs and miracles—are both possible and have actually taken place. One of the clearest pieces of evidence for this is the Qur'an itself. Therefore it is necessary to accept that this miracle took place, even if this teaching is not part of the essentials of the religion.

However, some have argued that the manifestation of such a miracle at the hands of the Prophet in response to the demands of the idolaters contradicts the verse, *Nothing keeps Us from sending signs except that the ancients denied them. We gave Thamūd the she-camel as an eye-opener, but they wronged her. We do not send the signs except for deterrence* (17:59). One reading of this verse is follows: 'We do not send such signs to this people, because, when We sent them to earlier peoples, they denied them, and these people are similar in nature to them, so they will likewise deny them. Therefore, there is no point in sending such signs, because they will be ineffective.' Alternatively, it could be read as saying: 'We will not send them because We sent them to their predecessors, who denied them, were punished, and perished as a result, and if we sent such signs to these people, they will likewise deny them, be punished, and perish utterly as well. However, We do not wish to hasten them to punishment. In any case, we will not send the signs to this people like we sent them to earlier ones.'

Therefore, this verse concerns signs that are sent in respond to people's demands where these signs do not support a prophet's claim of divine revelation—as is the case with the Qur'an and the Prophet's mission, or Moses' staff, or Jesus' reviving the dead—or those verses sent down as a grace from God, such as the supernatural powers displayed by the Prophet, which was not in response to any demands from his people.

Alike in meaning to this verse is the verse, *Or until you have a house of gold, or you ascend into the sky. And we will not believe your ascension until you*

bring down for us a book that we may read.' Say, 'Immaculate is my Lord! Am I anything but a human, a messenger?' (17:93).

In order to respond to this objection properly, it is necessary to lay down some preliminaries, namely that the Prophet was sent as the final divine messenger to all the people of this world, as indicated by the verse, *Say, 'O mankind! I am the Messenger of Allah to you all...'* (7:158), and the verse, *... and this Qur'an has been revealed to me that I may warn thereby you and whomever it may reach* (6:19), and the verse, *he is the Messenger of Allah and the Seal of the Prophets* (33:40). And there are other verses besides this.

The Prophet first began his mission in Mecca first by calling its inhabitants and those people who lived nearby to believe in him. In response, they did their utmost to persecute, abuse, and deride him, ultimately resolving to either expel, imprison, or murder him. Circumstances became sufficiently dangerous that God commanded him to migrate. He had amassed a decent following in Mecca, but most of its inhabitants remained disbelievers, while the faithful were a minority by comparison and subject to persecution. However, the community was not inconsiderable in size, as evinced by the verse, *Have you not regarded those who were told, 'Keep your hands off from fighting, and maintain the prayer...'* (4:77). This shows that some of them had sought permission to fight back against the idolaters, but God had not permitted them to do so (according to the traditions narrated concerning the occasion of this verses revelation). This shows that they were sufficiently numerous and well equipped to consider an armed response, and they were continuing to grow in numbers.

Then, the Prophet emigrated to Medina and expanded his mission there, spreading Islam amongst the city, the territory surrounding it, the Arab tribes, in Yemen, and throughout the Arabian Peninsula as a whole, save for Mecca and its territory. Then, he extended his mission even beyond the Peninsula by writing letters to the kings and rulers of Persia, Rome, and Egypt in the year 6 A.H.. He captured Mecca in the year 8 A.H., although a number of its inhabitants had already converted to Islam in the eight years between the Prophet's Emigration and his conquest of the city.

When the Prophet passed away, Islam had already spread significantly, but it continued to grow after him, with its message extending to the present day and reaching over one-fifth of the world's population.

Based on this preamble, we say: The miracle of the splitting the moon was of the category of miracle that was given in response to people's demands, and which would have occasioned divine punishment were they to deny it. They

did deny it and derided it as nothing more than magic. However, God was not about to destroy all of those to whom the Prophet had been sent to—namely the entirety of the world's population—because not all of them had yet been given conclusive proof of his prophethood. The splitting of the moon took place five years before the Emigration— *so that he who perishes might perish by a manifest proof* (8:42).

Neither was God about to eradicate all the inhabitants of Mecca and its environs while there were Muslims amongst them, as God says elsewhere, *And were it not for faithful men and faithful women, whom you did not know—lest you should trample them, and thus blame for killing them should fall on you unawares; so that Allah may admit into His mercy whomever He wishes. And had they been separate, We would have surely punished the faithless among them with a painful punishment* (48:25).

Equally, God was not going to save only the faithful and punish the disbelievers when so many of them would come to believe in the Prophet in the thirteen years between the splitting of the moon and the conquest of Mecca and all of them would convert—albeit outwardly—following its conquest.

This is because neither all nor most of the inhabitants of Mecca and its environs were obstinate or wilful in their disbelief. It was their leaders and rulers who derided the Prophet, persecuted the faithful, and demanded that he show them signs. It is about them that God has said, *As for the faithless, it is the same to them whether you warn them or do not warn them, they will not have faith* (2:6). God warns these obstinate disbelievers on numerous occasions in the Qur'an that they will be deprived of faith and perish. They did not believe and God did punish them at the Battle of Badr. Therefore, His predictions came to pass.

Now, if someone were to argue that the verse, *Nothing keeps Us from sending signs except that the ancients denied them*, is general in scope and, therefore, negates the possibility of any such miracles being sent, this is incorrect. This is because the verse in question definitely does not apply to miracles being sent in support of a prophet's claims, such as the Qur'an—which supported the Prophet's mission—or the signs sent down as acts of divine grace, such as the supernatural powers manifested by the Prophet, such as giving people information about the Unseen, healing the sick through his supplications, and other such acts.

Now, even if this verse was general in scope, it would only apply to those signs sent in response to demands. Even then, this would only mean that God would not send the signs and miracles demanded by the Quraysh—or that

He did not send the Prophet with such miracles—because previous nations had denied them and the Quraysh were of the same nature as them, so they would deny them and this would require God to punish them, but God did not wish to hasten them to punishment.

However, God has clarified why he did not punish the Quraysh in the verse, *But Allah will not punish them while you are in their midst, nor will Allah punish them while they plead for forgiveness* (8:33). This shows that what prevented God from punishing them was the presence of the Messenger amongst them. This is also highlighted by the verse, *They were about to hound you out of the land, to expel you from it, but then they would not have stayed after you but a little* (17:76).

Later, He said, *What excuse have they that Allah should not punish them, when they bar others from the Holy Mosque, and they are not its custodians? Its custodians are only the Godwary, but most of them do not know. Their prayer at the House is nothing but whistling and clapping. So taste the punishment because of what you used to defy* (8:34–35).

These verses show that there was nothing holding back God's punishment from the Quraysh other than the presence of the Prophet amongst them. And when this barrier was removed by his departure from Mecca, that was when they tasted God's punishment in the form of the severe losses they suffered at the Battle of Badr.

Therefore, to sum up, the reason why God would not send signs to them is because the ancients had denied such signs previously, and the Quraysh resembled them in their nature with regards to the obstinate denial of God's signs. At the same time, the existence of the Prophet amongst them prevented God from subjecting them to divine punishment. However, once they had committed misdeeds worthy of divine punishment and their protection—in the form of the presence of the Prophet—had been removed by the Emigration, then there was neither anything to prevent them from being punished nor any reason not to send down a sign in order for the sentence of punishment to become due against them. Therefore, they were punished both for their denial of the sign and for the other punishable misdeeds they had committed, such as baring others from the Holy Mosque and the like thereof.

From this, we can conclude that the verse, *Nothing keeps Us from sending signs...*, only means that He will not send such signs so long as the Prophet is amongst them. As for sending such signs but delaying the punishment until he is no longer amongst them, there is no indication about this in the verse either way. God has explicitly stated in the Qur'an that the Battle of Badr was

a sign from Him and that what befell the Quraysh in it was a form of divine punishment. The same is true if the verse is read as meaning that God did not send signs to them because they would have no effect on a people who were so committed to denying them. Now, sending such signs and delaying the resulting punishment for their denial until the Prophet was no longer among them would yield the benefit that God *may confirm the truth and bring falsehood to naught* (8:8). Therefore, the miracle of splitting the moon would be one of the divine signs whose purpose was to make its recipients deserving of punishment once the Prophet had departed from their midst.

As for the verse, *Say, 'Immaculate is my Lord! Am I anything but a human, a messenger?'* (17:93), it does not preclude God supporting the claims of the Prophet by sending miraculous signs, nor does it deny the possibility of such interventions. On the contrary, it negates the idea that these miracles come from the Prophet himself, insofar as he is a human being and a messenger of God. If it genuinely meant that the Prophet could not perform miracles, this would entail a denial of the miracles of all the prophets, because each and every one of them is 'a human, a messenger' and the Qur'an explicitly contradicts such a denial by virtue of the fact that it is replete with stories of prophets performing miracles. An even clearer contradiction of this is the verse of the Qur'an that challenges the deniers to produce something equal to it.

In fact, what this verse means is that—as a human and a messenger—the Prophet is not capable of producing the miracles the idolaters demand from himself, as this is an affair that is decided by God: If He wishes, He will send down a sign, and if He does not, then He will not. Elsewhere, God says, *They swear by Allah with solemn oaths that were a sign to come to them they would surely believe in it. Say, 'The signs are only with Allah,' and what will bring home to you that they will not believe even if they came?* (6:109).

And about the people of Noah, He says, *They said, 'O Noah, you have disputed with us already, and you have disputed with us exceedingly. Now bring us what you threaten us with should you be truthful. He said, 'Allah will indeed bring it on you if He wishes, and you cannot thwart'* (11:33).

And He says, *A messenger may not bring any sign except by Allah's permission* (40:78).

And there are many other verses in this vein.

Another objection to the miracle of splitting the moon reads as follows: If the moon had split as is claimed, then all of humankind would have seen it. Moreover, astronomers would have recorded the event all over the world, because this would have been a truly momentous celestial event, as nothing

like this has come down to us in the books of history or in works dealing with the heavens, when this is certainly something that people would have wanted to record and pass on!

To this, we can respond as follows:

First, we can discount the objection because there is no evidence that every terrestrial or celestial event known to people is recorded by them and handed down from one generation to the next.

Second, the Hejaz, the rest of the Arabian Peninsula, and many of the surrounding lands did not have observatories or professional astronomers. These were found in India to the east and Rome and Greece to the west and other places, but there is no evidence that an observatory existed in the Arabian Peninsula at this time—which, according to some narrations, too place at the beginning of the fourteenth night of Dhū al-Ḥijja, some five years before the Emigration—and this might not have been visible to observers in other lands that were far away from Mecca. Some reports indicate that the moon was a full moon that split at around sunset, when it was just beginning to rise, and it only remained split apart for a very short period of time before joining together again. Therefore, by the time it became visible in lands to the west of Arabia, it would have already returned to its original form.

Another objection is that such a split in the moon could only take place if the gravitational forces holding the two halves together were somehow nullified, in which case it would be impossible for them to come back together. Therefore, if the moon split, it would not recombine itself again.

The answer to this is that there is nothing rationally impossible about this taking place. As for this being something unusual, this is the very definition of a miracle. After all, had it been impossible for the two halves to re-join one another, it would have been equally impossible for them to split apart in the first place. However, there is nothing impossible out this, because we have already established that miracles can and do take place.

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Verses 9–42

This section of verses cites stories of past nations that contain warnings for the Prophet's audience. In particular, it singles out the peoples of Noah, ʿĀd, Thamūd, Lot, and Pharaoh. It reminds its audience of their experiences by summarizing the accounts they would have heard previously and calling attention to the terrible and painful punishments that befell them as a result of denying the signs of God, His messengers. This is illustrated by the line in the previous section, *There have already come to them reports containing admonishment* (54:4).

And to emphasise the message behind this retelling and give form to the terrifying warnings they contain, God follows each and every one of the accounts with the question, *So how were My punishment and My warnings?* (54:16, 21, 30), before emphasizing the purpose of these stories to warn and admonish with the question, *Certainly We have made the Qur'an simple for the sake of admonishment. So is there anyone who will be admonished?* (54:40)

كَذَّبَتْ قَبْلَهُمْ قَوْمُ نُوحٍ فَكَذَّبُوا عَبْدَنَا وَقَالُوا مَجْنُونٌ وَازْدُجِرَ ﴿٩﴾

(54:9) ***The people of Noah impugned before them. So they impugned Our servant and said, 'A crazy man, and one possessed!'***

Note that the verse uses the verb 'impugn' (*takdhīb*) twice. However, note that the first one—*the people of Noah impugned before them*—does not take a direct object, it merely says that they impugned. The second instance—*So they impugned Our servant*—does, as it is an explanation of the first one. This is similar to the verse, *Noah called out to his Lord, and said, 'My Lord! My son is indeed from my family. Your promise is indeed true, and You are the fairest of all judges'* (11:45).

Some have said that the meaning of the first instance of 'impugn' is that they impugned the messengers generally, while the second instance refers to them impugning Noah specifically. This is in the same vein as the verse in Sūrah al-Shuʿarāʾ, *The people of Noah impugned the messengers* (26:105). In this case, the meaning of the verse would be: 'The people of Noah denied the messengers, therefore they denied Noah.' This is a sound reading of the verse.

Others have said that this shows that they denied Noah continuously:

The people of Noah impugned him throughout his mission, and whenever one generation of deniers passed away, another came and denied him again, *So they impugned Our servant*. However, this is a far-fetched reading of the verse.

Similarly far-fetched is the suggestion that the meaning of the first instance of 'impugned' is that they intended to deny him, while the second instance is that they did so.

In the phrase, *So they impugned Our servant...*, God refers to Noah as 'Our servant' (*'abdanā*) in order to elevate his status and venerate him, and to indicate that their denial of Noah was tantamount to denying God, because a servant has nothing of his own, rather whatever he has belongs to his master—God.

'A crazy man, and one possessed (wa-zdujir)!': Meaning that he was possessed by a jinn and that this was the cause of his madness. This shows that the Quraysh did not stop at merely denying him. On the contrary, they labelled him as a madman and claimed that he was being afflicted by a jinn, so that when he spoke, these were the words of a man possessed rather than a divine revelation.

Some have said that *wa-zdujir* here refers to his people (in which case it means 'restrained' and should not be read as part of his people's speech), meaning that they tried to prevent him from conveying his message through all manner of threats and persecution. However, the first meaning seems more appropriate to the context.

فَدَعَا رَبَّهُ أَنِّي مَغْلُوبٌ فَانْتَصِرْ ﴿١٠﴾

(54:10) ***Thereat he invoked his Lord, 'I have been overcome, so help.'***

When Noah invokes his Lord's help (*intiṣār*), this is him calling down divine retribution on his people. He says he has been 'overcome' not in the sense that they have defeated his arguments, but in the sense they have forcibly suppressed him. Also, this is merely a summary of his supplication, the full form of which, along with his arguments against his people, can be found in Sūrah Hūd and elsewhere.

فَفَتَحْنَا أَبْوَابَ السَّمَاءِ بِمَاءٍ مُنْهَمِرٍ ﴿١١﴾

(54:11) ***Then We opened the gates of the sky with pouring waters* (mā' munhamir)**

In *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, we read: '*Hamr* means to pour out tears or water forcefully, while *inhimār* (from which is derived *munhamir*) means for them to be poured out thusly.' God opening the gates of the sky with pouring waters is a metaphor for the extreme and unceasing rainfall, as though it had been held back behind a gate and that gate had now been opened, allowing the waters to surge forth.

وَفَجَّرْنَا الْأَرْضَ عُيُونًا فَالْتَقَى الْمَاءُ عَلَىٰ أَمْرٍ قَدْ قُدِرَ ﴿١٢﴾

(54:12) ***and We made the earth burst forth*** **(fajjarnā al-arḍ)** ***with springs*** **(ʿuyūn)*****, and the water met for a preordained purpose.***

According to *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, 'to cause to burst forth' (*tafjīr*) means to split the earth with water; *ʿuyūn* (sing. *ʿayn*) refers to water that flows from beneath the ground and gathers in pools that are round like the eye (*ʿayn*) of an animal.

Therefore, the meaning of the first part of the verse is: 'We made springs erupt from the earth and cause them to flow abundantly and unceasingly.'

... and the water met for a preordained purpose: In other words, the two varieties of water—one from the heavens and one from the earth—came together for a purpose ordained by God, meaning according to His plan, neither being more nor less nor sooner nor later than He had intended.

Note that *water* here is singular rather than dual. This is because the term is being used as the name of a species, which encompasses both varieties of water. The *preordained purpose* for which these waters met was the flood which God had sent.

وَحَمَلْنَاهُ عَلَىٰ ذَاتِ أَلْوَاحٍ وَدُسُرٍ ﴿١٣﴾

(54:13) ***We bore him on a vessel made of planks and nails*** **(dhāt alwāḥ wa dusur),**

The *vessel made of planks and nails*, is, of course, Noah's ark. *Alwāḥ* ('planks', sing. *lawḥ*) refers to the wooden strips that are held together by *dusur* ('nails', sing. *disār*) in order to build such a vessel. Some other meanings of these terms have been suggested, but they do not fit the context of the verse as well as these.

تَجْرِي بِأَعْيُنِنَا جَزَاءً لِمَنْ كَانَ كُفِرَ ﴿١٤﴾

(54:14) ***which sailed in Our sight, as a retribution for him who was repudiated***

In other words, the ark sailed across the waters that had swallowed up the earth under all forms of divine protection, guardianship, and oversight. Some have suggested that the phrase '*Our sight*' actually refers to 'the sight of our allies (*awliyā'*) and the angels we had assigned to watch over it.'

... as a retribution for him who was repudiated: In other words, the sailing of the ship in this fashion, which saved all of those aboard it from destruction was meant as a retribution for those of Noah's people who had disbelieved in him and rejected his message. Therefore, this verse is in the same vein as, *We delivered him and his family from the great agony... Thus indeed do We reward the virtuous* (37:80).

وَلَقَدْ تَرَكْنَاهَا آيَةً فَهَلْ مِنْ مُدَّكِرٍ ﴿١٥﴾

(54:15) ***Certainly We have left it as a sign; so is there anyone who will be admonished?***

Based on the context of the verse, the 'it' in *We have left it as a sign* refers to Noah's ark. Therefore, the meaning of the verse is: 'I swear that We left that ship, through which we saved Noah and those who were with him from the flood, a sign and we made it a sign that people could reflect upon and understand that God was one, that the call of His prophets was true, and that His punishment was severe. This verse indicates that Noah's ark must have remained until the time of its revelation as a reminder of the flood for humankind. Some have said about this verse that Noah's ark was on Mount Jūdī and that some of the earliest members of the Muslim *umma* had found it. In our commentary on Sūrah Hūd, towards the end of our discussion of Noah's story there, we transmitted a report that early Muslims had come across fragments of wood that were from Noah's ark on Mount Jūdī near Mount Ararat. Interested readers can refer there for more details.

Some have said that the 'it' in *We have left it* actually refers to the details of the story.

فَكَيْفَ كَانَ عَذَابِي وَنُذُرِ ﴿١٦﴾

(54:16) ***So how were My punishment and My warnings?***

This is a rhetorical question intended to terrify, as it conveys the severity

of God's punishment and the truthfulness of His warnings.

وَلَقَدْ يَسَّرْنَا الْقُرْآنَ لِلذِّكْرِ فَهَلْ مِنْ مُدَّكِرٍ ﴿١٧﴾

(54:17) ***Certainly We have made the Qur'an simple*** **(yassarnā al-Qur'ān)** ***for the sake of remembrance. So is there anyone who will be reminded?***

'To make simple' (*taysīr*) means 'to make easy.' In this case, God has made the Qur'an simple in such a way that it is easy for all manner of people—of any social class, level of education, or depth of intelligence—can understand it, each according to their own level of understanding.

It could also refer to the fact that God has sent down transcendent realities from beyond the limits of human comprehension in the form of Arabic speech that is comprehensible to all. This is in the same vein as the verse, *We have made it an Arabic Qur'an so that you may apply reason, and indeed it is with Us in the Mother Book and it is surely sublime and wise* (43:3–4).

'Remembrance' (*dhikr*) here refers to the remembrance of God, through His divine names, attributes, or actions. Al-Rāghib says in his *Mufradāt*: 'The word *dhikr* ('remembrance') is sometimes used in the sense of a faculty of the soul that allows the human being to retain knowledge and information, which is akin to memory (*ḥifẓ*). The difference between *dhikr* and *ḥifẓ* is that the former is used with regards to the preservation of that information, while the former is used with regards to its recall. However, *dhikr* can also be used to signify the presence of something in the heart or to signify an utterance. That is why it is said that "Remembrance is of two varieties, remembrance of the heart and remembrance of the tongue, and each of these is of two kinds, remembrance after forgetting (*al-dhikr 'an al-nisyān*) and remembrance that is not after forgetting but due to continuous recall (*idāmat al-ḥifẓ*), and every utterance is a form of *dhikr* ('remembrance' or 'mention').'

Therefore, the meaning of the verse is: 'I swear that We have made the Qur'an easy that people might remember through it, so that they might remember God and His rank. So, is there anyone who will be reminded by it, believe in God, and follow the true religion to which He summons them?'

The verse is a general call to be reminded of God by the Qur'an, after affirming the truthfulness of the warning it contains and the severity of the punishment of which it warns.

كَذَّبَتْ عَادٌ فَكَيْفَ كَانَ عَذَابِي وَنُذُرِ ﴿١٨﴾

(54:18) *ʿĀd impugned. So how were My punishment and My warnings?*

The chapter now turns to another cautionary story of a past nation and the terrible punishment which befell them. Note that this is not joined to the previous verse by a conjunction (such as 'and' or 'so')—and neither are subsequent stories—because each and every one of these stories stands on its own and suffices as a warning for anyone who wishes to take a lesson from it.

So how were My punishment and My warnings? The tone of this question draws the attention of the audience to the terrible punishment recounted in the subsequent verse, *Indeed We unleashed upon them...* (54:19). Note that, unlike the previous instance of this phrase, it is not intended to terrify them or emphasise the severity of the punishment and veracity of the warning, as it appears before mention of the punishment. This is what some scholars have said, and it is a sound interpretation.

إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ رِيحًا صَرْصَرًا فِي يَوْمِ نَحْسٍ مُسْتَمِرٍّ ﴿١٩﴾

(54:19) *Indeed We unleashed upon them an icy gale* (ṣarṣar) *on an incessantly ill-fated day* (yawm naḥs mustamirr)

According to *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, the word *ṣarṣar* denotes a wind with fierce gusts, *naḥs* means something ill-omened or inauspicious, and *mustamirr* is an adjective of *naḥs*, meaning that the wind was sent against the people of ʿĀd continuously on a day that was ill-fated for them and that it blew unceasingly, such that there was no hope of reprieve or salvation.

Now, the term '*day*' here should not be taken to mean a literal day, but merely a period of time. This is illustrated by what God says elsewhere in the Qur'an, *so We unleashed upon them an icy gale during ill-fated days* (41:16), where the term 'days' is used instead of 'day.' And elsewhere, also, we read, *which He disposed against them for seven gruelling nights and eight days* (69:7).

Some commentators have also understood the word *naḥs* as signifying 'cold.'

تَنْزِعُ النَّاسَ كَأَنَّهُمْ أَعْجَازُ نَخْلٍ مُنْقَعِرٍ ﴿٢٠﴾

(54:20) *knocking down people as if they were trunks of uprooted palm trees*

The doer of the verb *knocking down* is the *icy gale* mentioned in the

previous verse. In other words: 'The icy gale knocked down people…'—the rest of the verse's meaning is clear, and it conjures the image of the people of 'Ād's bodies being strewn about like fallen logs.

فَكَيْفَ كَانَ عَذَابِي وَنُذُرِ ﴿٢١﴾ وَلَقَدْ يَسَّرْنَا الْقُرْآنَ لِلذِّكْرِ فَهَلْ مِنْ مُدَّكِرٍ ﴿٢٢﴾

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(54:21–22) ***So how were My punishment and My warnings?! Certainly We have made the Qur'an simple for the sake of remembrance. So is there anyone who will be reminded?***

The explanation of these two verses has already been discussed previously.

On the Meaning of Good–fated and Ill–fated Days

An 'ill-fated day' refers to a period of time where, whatever transpires in them, its outcome is always evil, and a person's deeds—or a specific variety of their deeds—performed during this time bring them no blessings. A 'good-fated day' is the opposite of this.

There is no way to prove that a particular day or specific time is either good-fated or ill-fated, as the nature of time is uniform in its parts and dimensions. We cannot fully comprehend the various causes and factors influencing the occurrence of events or actions in such a way that would enable us to determine whether it is auspicious or inauspicious based on these. Therefore, we do not have enough information to know whether a particular event at a particular time was the result of good or ill fortune.

And, based on the above, there is also no way for us to decisively disprove the existence of good or ill fortune, just as there was no way to decisively prove it. Moreover, even if its existence seems far-fetched, this alone is not enough to disregard it, as improbability is not the same as impossibility. This is all from the perspective reason.

With regards to revelation, the Qur'an speaks of ill-fated days and their opposite: *Indeed We unleashed upon them an icy gale on an incessantly ill-fated day* (54:19); *… so We unleashed upon them an icy gale during ill-fated days* (41:16).

However, neither the broader context of the story nor the wording of these two verses suggest anything more than this inauspiciousness being specific to the time in which God punished 'Ād with the icy gale. This was a period of seven nights and eight days, one after another, during which the punishment

continued unceasingly. It does not appear that there was anything specifically ill-fated about that week other than this, or else all moments would be ill-fated, and this would not depend on the passage of months or years.

In contrast to ill-fated times, the Qur'an also speaks of good-fated or auspicious times. For example:

By the Manifest Book! Indeed We sent it down on a blessed night (44:2–3)—This refers to the Night of Determination (*Laylat al-Qadr*), which God describes elsewhere with the verse, *The Night of Ordainment is better than a thousand months* (97:3). The apparent meaning of this is that the blessings of this night and its auspiciousness derive from its connection with momentous spiritual events or the outpourings of divine grace from the Unseen realm. For example, the resolution of the divine decree (*qaḍā'*), the descent of the angels and the Spirit, or its being peace. God says: *Every definitive matter is resolved in it* (44:4), and *In it the angels and the Spirit descend, by the leave of their Lord, with every command. It is peaceful until the rising of the dawn* (97:5).

In this case, its blessedness and auspiciousness stems from the merits of performing acts of worship therein, the increased reward they incur as a result, and the special divine grace available to those who turn towards God during these times.

As for the traditions, there are a great many that speak of good and ill-fated days of the week, or specific dates on the Arabic, Persian, or Roman calendars. These narration abound in collections of traditions, but the majority of them are either weak or have incomplete chains of narration, even if one or two of them have reliable chains.

There also are traditions that enumerate the ill-fated days of the week or year, such as Wednesdays, or the last Wednesday of every month, or seven days from every Arabic month, and two days from every Roman month. Many of these—and especially those that single out particular days of the week or dates on the Arabic calendar—refer to certain days as ill-fated because of events that took place on them that were unpleasant for religious sentiments. For example, the death of the Prophet, the martyrdom of (Imām) Ḥusayn, Abraham being thrown into the bonfire, or divine punishment befalling a particular nation, or the creation of Hell, or the like thereof.

It goes without saying that such days are considered ill-fated, such that people avoid pursuing desirable things or seeking enjoyment therein, in order to strengthen people's piety and augment their religious spirit. Conversely, not attaching importance to these days and devoting oneself to the pursuit of one's desires and amusement therein is tantamount to turning away from

the truth, violating the sanctity of the religion, and disrespecting those who embody it. Therefore, the ill-fatedness of these days derives from the spiritual negativity associated with them due to a variety of matters of social convention, which nevertheless suggests a negative relationship with religiosity for those who do not observe them.

At the same time, there are numerous narrations that enjoin people to seek refuge in God through almsgiving, fasting, supplication, or reciting some of the Qur'an on these days in order to repel its ill-fatedness, as we read in the *Majālis* of Ibn al-Shaykh, who narrates the following tradition from Sahl b. Yaʿqūb Abī Nawās from Imām al-ʿAskarī: 'I said, "My master, on most of these days people are prevented from attaining their goals—and it is said they are full of perils and ill omens—so show me how to guard against these perils, for I am compelled by necessity to seek my needs therein!" He said, "O Sahl, our followers who cling to our loyalty (*wilāya*) are protected. Even if they must pass through surging seas, endless deserts, or a gauntlet of wolves, beasts, and enemies from among the *jinn* and humankind, they will be safe from their perils by virtue of their loyalty to us. So place your trust in God and devote yourself to your pure Imāms, then turn wherever you wish and set out for wherever you wish...' then he bid him to recite some verses of the Qur'an and supplications to protect himself from ill-fated days and told him to do as he wished therein.

In *al-Khiṣāl*, Shaykh al-Ṣadūq narrates via a chain of narrators from Muḥammad b. Riyāḥ al-Fallāḥ: 'I saw Abū Ibrāhīm (Imām al-Kāẓim) having cupping done one Friday. I said to him, "May I be your ransom, do you have cupping done on a Friday?" He said, "Recite Āyat al-Kursī whenever your blood is excited, whether night or day, recite Āyat al-Kursī and then have cupping done."'

Also in *al-Khiṣāl*, via a chain of narrators from Muḥammad b. Aḥmad al-Daqqāq: 'I wrote to Abū al-Ḥasan al-Thānī (Imām al-Riḍā) asking him about going out on the last Wednesday of the month. He wrote to me: "Whoever goes out on the last Wednesday of the month in opposition to the augurs will be protected from every harm, healed from injury, and God will look after his needs." I wrote to him another time asking about having cupping done on the last Wednesday of the month. He wrote back to me: "Whoever has cupping done on the last Wednesday of the month in opposition to the augurs will be cured of every illness, protected from every injury, and his place of cupping will not be bruised."'

A tradition in the same vein can be found in *Tuḥuf al-ʿuqūl*, in which

al-Ḥusayn b. Masʿūd relates: ʿOne day, I visited Abū al-Ḥasan ʿAlī b. Muḥammad. On that day, I had stubbed my toe, a rider had struck me and bruised my shoulder, and I had been caught in a press of people and they tore some of my clothing. I said, "May God save me from your evil, what an ill-fated day you are!" He said to me, "O Ḥasan, what is the meaning of this? Do you cast the blame for your sin on one who is innocent of it?" Whereat my sense returned to me and I realized my error, so I said, "O my master, I plead for God's forgiveness!" He said, "O Ḥasan, what wrong have the days done for you to take an ill omen from them whenever you are recompensed for your deeds in them?" I said, "I plead for God's forgiveness eternally! This is my repentance, O scion of the Messenger of God!" He said, "It will not avail you, but God will take you to task for blaming someone for something for which they are blameless! Do you not realize, O Ḥasan, that God is the one who rewards and punishes and recompenses for deeds, whether in this world on the next?" I said, "Of course, O my master!" He said, "Do not think that the days have any hand in God's decree." I said, "Of course, O my master!"'

The above narrations—and there are many others of similar import—indicate that certain days were seen as ill-fated or inauspicious based on the beliefs and superstitions of the ordinary folk, who took omens from such things. However, as we shall discuss, belief in omens can still have an effect on a person's psyche. These narrations address the inauspiciousness of these days by turning people's minds away from belief in such superstitions, if they are able, and by directing them to seek refuge in God and to seek the protection of verses of the Qur'an or supplications that they can recite if they are not.

Some scholars have argued that the traditions that appear to affirm the reality of inauspicious or ill-fated days were actually uttered out of precautionary dissimulation (*taqiyya*). This is not unlikely, because the belief that certain times, places, and circumstances are unlucky or ill-fated is prevalent amongst ordinary folk from all peoples and nations, in spite of their differences and divisions, since time immemorial until the present day. In fact, in the early days, even educated folk subscribed to such beliefs and ascribed them to the Prophet himself, such that no one could reject them. For example, we find narrated in *Kitāb al-musalsalāt*, via a chain going back to al-Faḍl b. al-Rabīʿ: 'One day, I was with my master (the ʿAbbāsid caliph) al-Ma'mūn, and we wished to go out on Wednesday. Al-Ma'mūn said, "It an inauspicious day. I heard this from my father, (Hārūn) al-Rashīd. He heard it from al-Mahdī. He heard it from al-Manṣūr. He heard it from his father, Muḥammad b. ʿAlī. He heard it from his father, ʿAlī. He heard it from his father, ʿAbd Allāh b. ʿAbbās. He

heard from the Messenger of God: "Surely the last Wednesday of the month is a day of incessant misfortune."'

As for those narrations that cast certain days of the week or the year as auspicious or lucky, the basis for this is similar to the first basis on which traditions cast other days as ill-fated or inauspicious. In short, these days have become associated with good fortune because of certain auspicious religious events that took place on them, such as the birth of the Prophet or the beginning of his mission. For example, it is transmitted that the Prophet said: 'O God! Bless my nation on the morning of each Saturday and Thursday.' And it has been transmitted that God softened iron for David on a Tuesday and that the Prophet would set out on a journey on Fridays, and that 'al-Aḥad' (Sunday) is one of the names of God.

So, based on this lengthy discussion, it is clear that the idea of certain days being lucky or unlucky, or auspicious or inauspicious, does not rest on anything more than their association with certain important religious events, whether these are pleasant or unpleasant to religious sensibilities or in their effect on people's psyches. As for the idea that any day (or other unit of time) is innately lucky or unlucky, and that this has a real effect on the natural world and the events that transpire in it, there is no evidence for this, and any traditions which appear to suggest this must either be understood to have been uttered out of *taqiyya* or to be without basis.

Discourse On Heavenly Bodies[1]

From a rational perspective, the idea that certain heavenly bodies or celestial alignments bring about good or bad fortune is no different to that of certain days of the week or year being auspicious or inauspicious. There is no way to prove that the Sun and Jupiter are auspicious planets, or that the conjunction of two stars in ascent is auspicious. Likewise, there is no way to prove that Mars is inauspicious, or that whenever the Moon in Scorpio is an ill-fated time.

It is true that the ancient astronomers of India believed that there was a connection between the movements of the heavens and the events on the earth, and not only the movements of the planets, but of the fixed stars as well. Others believed that alignment of the seven planets (but not the fixed stars) was connected to worldly events and that each of them had its own qualities and effects. This knowledge was known as *aḥkām al-nujūm* (or 'the laws of

1 We have shortened the heading. The original is "about heavenly bodies being auspicious or inauspicious and their having an effect on terrestrial events." (Pub.)

the stars'), and these astronomers believed that they could predict the effects the different alignments of the planets would have on worldly events.

Astrologers differed over the nature of the stars and planets: There were those who claimed that the planets were living entities with souls and free-will that could act with agency in the world, while others said that they did not have souls but could still act with agency in the world. Then there were those that said they were accessories to God's agency in the world, such that it was He that set events in motion but that the planets and their alignments were portents of these events, even though they did not have any agency or role in bringing them about. Others still said that there was no connection between the planets and worldly events, even in the sense of their arrangement portending them. Instead, it was merely God's habit to cause a certain kind of event at the time of a particular planetary arrangement, but this was purely arbitrary and something that He could alter at any time.

Furthermore, some astrological laws are not consistent, such that a particular arrangement of the stars and planets necessitates a particular prediction. On the contrary, the prediction may obtain sometimes and not obtain at others. Some of the wondrous stories and accounts that have reached us concerning the predictions of astrology do suggest that there is some kind of a connection between celestial events and terrestrial one, albeit a partial and incomplete one. The contents of some of the traditions of the Imāms of the Prophet's Household also seem to confirm this.

Therefore, it is not possibly to decisively claim that a particular planet or celestial arrangement is either auspicious or inauspicious. As for the connection between the alignments of the planets and worldly events, this is not something that can be denied, even by a sceptic. However, as for the view that the planets or celestial alignments have a direct effect on the world below them—whether as intelligent beings or otherwise—there is nothing about this that contradicts the essential tenets of the religion, unless we say that these planets are creators or originator of the beings below them in the hierarchy of existence in a way that renders them independent from God (as opposed to being intermediaries in the process of creation), as this would be polytheism. However, no one claims this, not even the Sabaeans who worship the celestial bodies. It would also run contrary to Islamic teachings to claim that they play a role in directing the cosmic order in a way that is independent from God, which would assign them the role of lordship (*rubūbiyya*), from which derives worship (*maʿbūdiyya*). This too is polytheism, and it is the doctrine of the Sabaeans who worship the planets.

Now, there are many narrations that have come down concerning certain celestial bodies being either auspicious or inauspicious, whether for or against this position. We will present a few examples of the different categories of them below:

There are narrations that appear to acknowledge both auspicious and inauspicious celestial bodies and alignments.

For example, in the *Risāla al-dhahabiyya* from Imām al-Riḍā, we read: 'Know that it is best to have intercourse with your wives while the moon is in Aries or Aquarius, and that it is even better when the moon is in Taurus, because the moon is exalted when in Taurus.'

In *Biḥār al-anwār*, Majlisī narrates from *al-Nawādir*, which transmits via a chain going back to Ḥumrān from Imām al-Ṣādiq: 'Whoever sets off on a journey or marries while the moon is in Scorpio will see not benefit from it.'

In the *Kitāb al-Nujūm* of Ibn Ṭāwūs, it is narrated from ʿAlī: 'It is disliked that a person should travel at a time of the month when the moon is in conjunction and also when the moon is in Scorpio.'

According to some scholars, narrations such as these can be understood as having been uttered under the guise of *taqiyya*. It is also possible that some of these teachings were espoused by the Imāms in response to the beliefs of the ordinary folk, as, for example, seems likely with those narrations that enjoin people to give charity in order to repel the inauspiciousness of a certain planetary alignment.

In his *Nawādir*, al-Rāwandī narrates via a chain of transmission from Mūsā b. Jaʿfar, from his father, from his grandfather, the following the tradition: 'When you wake up, give some charity (*ṣadaqa*) to repel from yourself thereby the inauspiciousness of that day, and when you enter the evening, give some charity to repel from yourself thereby the inauspiciousness of that night…'—However, reports such as this can also be read as affirming that there is a direct connection between the alignment of the planet and the stars and events on earth.

Then there are those traditions that appear to deny the effect of the stars on worldly events and strictly forbid people from relying on astrology or even occupying themselves with its study. For example, we read in *Nahj al-balāgha*: 'The astrologer is like the soothsayer, and the soothsayer is like the sorcerer, and the sorcerer is like the disbeliever, and the disbeliever is in Hellfire.' However, there are other traditions which indicate that astrology is authentic and permit people to study it, and from these it becomes apparent that this prohibition on pursuing astrology or believing in it refers to believing that the stars have

an influence that is independent of God, which leads one to polytheism, as we have already discussed above.

Then there are those traditions that indicate that astrology is real but that a little knowledge of it is of no benefit, while it is impossible to acquire much knowledge of it, as we see in *al-Kāfī*. There, al-Kulaynī narrates from ʿAbd al-Raḥmān b. Sayyāba: 'I said to Imām al-Ṣādiq, "May I be your ransom, people say that it is forbidden to study astrology, but I am interested in it. If it is something that will harm my faith, then I have no need of anything that harms my faith, but if it does not harm my faith, then by God I am fascinated by it and desire to study it!" He said, "It is not as they say. It will not harm your faith... but you will be studying something much of which cannot be obtained and a little of which is of no use."'

In *Biḥār al-anwār*, it is narrated from the *Kitāb al-nujūm* of Ibn Ṭāwūs, who narrates from Muʿāwiya b. Ḥakīm, from Muḥammad b. Ziyād, from Muḥammad b. Yaḥyā al-Khathʿamī: 'I asked Imām al-Ṣādiq about astrology, is it true? He told me, "Yes." I said, 'Is there someone on the earth who knows it?' He said, "Yes, there is someone on the earth who knows it."' There are a number of narrations which state: 'None know it except the People of the House from India and the People of the House from the Arabs' some also say '...from the Quraysh.'

These narrations support what we have said earlier about there being some general connection between celestial alignments and worldly events.

Of course, there is also the narration that reads: 'God sent down the planet Jupiter to earth in the form of a man. He met a non-Arab man and taught him astronomy until he thought he had learnt it completely, and then he asked him, "Tell me, where is Jupiter?" The man answered, "I do not see it in the firmament and I do not know where it is." So Jupiter left him and took the hand of a man from India and taught him astronomy until he thought he had learnt it completely. Then, he asked him, "Tell me, where is Jupiter?" He answered, "My observations tell me that you are Jupiter." As soon as he said this, he gasped and died, but his family inherited this knowledge from him, and the knowledge is there still.' However, this appears to be a fabrication.

Discourse on Taking Omens from Worldly Events

This means either to see some event as a portent of good fortune, known in Arabic as *tafāʾul*, or as an omen of ill fortune, which is known as *taṭayyur*. Now, it is very often that these premonitions—both good and bad—turn out to be accurate, but this is because of the effect they have on the psyche of the

person who believes in them.

Islam has drawn a distinction between *tafā'ul* and *taṭayyur*, in that it has bid people to take good omens from things and forbidden them from taking things as bad omens. This confirms the fact that such omens primarily affect the psyche of the person who perceives them.

As for seeing good omens in things, it is narrated from the Prophet: 'See good omens in things and good will come to you.' In fact, the Prophet himself would often take things as a good omen, and there are many examples of this that can be found in accounts of his life.[1]

As for finding bad omens, there are many examples in the Qur'an, where the peoples of various prophets took their preaching to be an ill omen and refused to believe in them. The prophets responded to their people by saying words to the effect that their superstition would not turn truth into falsehood nor turn falsehood into truth and that the matter was in the hands of God and not in that of an omen that could not bring itself any benefit, let alone bring good or evil or happiness or misery to others. For example, God says, *They said, 'Indeed we take you for a bad omen. If you do not relinquish we will stone you, and surely a painful punishment will visit you from us.' They said, 'Your bad omens attend you…'* (36:18–19). In other words, your own superstition brings evil to you, and this evil comes from you, not from us. Elsewhere, He says, *They said, 'We take for a bad omen you and those who are with you.' He said, 'Your bad omens are with Allah…'* (27:47). This means: 'Whatever good or evil comes to you is ultimately from God; He is the one who determines what happens to you, not me or those who are with me. We have no control over these matters.'

There are numerous traditions which prohibit people from finding bad omens and enjoining them to repel their inauspiciousness by not paying attention to them or through trusting in God (*tawakkul*) and supplication. As we have already highlighted, this supports the idea that the effect of these bad omens is primarily in a person's psyche rather than objective reality. For example, in *al-Kāfī*, al-Kulaynī relates via a chain of transmissions from ʿAmr b. Ḥurayth, from Imām al-Ṣādiq: 'Bad omens are what you make of them, if

1 For example, during the events of Ḥudaybiyya, Suhayl b. ʿAmr came, so the Prophet said, 'Your affair has become easy' (*sahala ʿalaykum amrukum*—a play on Suhayl b. ʿAmr's name). Another example is that when he sent a letter to the Persian emperor inviting him to Islam, the emperor tore up his letter and sent him a handful of earth in response, the Prophet took this as an omen that the faithful would one day rule over all of his lands. (Trans.)

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you treat them as trivial, they are trivial, and if you believe them to be serious, they are serious, and if you believe them to be nothing, they are nothing.' This tradition is clearly predicated on the idea that whatever effect these omens have is via the psyche of the one who perceives them. There is a tradition in a similar vein narrated in Sunnī sources, which reads: 'There are three things that no one is safe from: Superstition, envy, and suspicion.' Someone asked, 'What should we do?' He said, 'If you see a bad omen, ignore it; if you are envious, do not act on it, and if you suspect something, do not believe it.'

In the same vein, in *al-Kāfī*, it is narrated from al-Qummī, from his father, from al-Nawfalī, from al-Sukūnī, from Imām al-Ṣādiq, from the Messenger of God: 'The expiation of superstition is to trust in God...'—note that by enjoining people to trust in God (*tawakkul*), this shows that the matter is under God's control and, therefore, nothing has any power to do harm to a person except by His leave. There is a similar tradition narrated in Sunnī sources, which reads: 'Superstition is polytheism and nothing to do with us, but God takes it away through placing one's trust in Him.'

In the same vein as the previous narration is the following from Imām al-Kāẓim: 'There are seven ill omens that a traveller encounters on his way: A crow that caws from his right; a dog with its tail raised; a hungry wolf that howls at a man while sitting on its tail, then rises and falls three times; a deer that leaps from his right side to his left side; a hooting owl; if his eyes fall on the face of a grey-haired woman; and a donkey with clipped ears. Whoever finds himself perturbed by any of these, then let him say: "I seek protection with you, O Lord, from the evil that I find in myself!" And, thereby, he is protected from it.'

Also included in this discussion are those things that ordinary people take as signs of bad luck, such as sneezing once when making a decision about something. There are numerous traditions, on a variety of forbidding people from believing in these ill omens and commanding them to place their trust in God instead. For example, in one Prophetic tradition narrated by both Sunnī and Shī'ī scholars: 'There is no contagion (*ʿadawī*), nor omens (*ṭīra*), nor haunting (*hāma*)[1], nor ill luck (*shu'm*), nor whistling while watering animals (*ṣafar*), nor breast-feeding after weaning, nor turning nomadic after emigrating, nor silence from morning until night, nor divorce before marriage, nor

1 This refers to the pre-Islamic Arab belief that a murder victim's soul would take the form of a bird and rest on his grave, crying and complaining of thirst, until someone avenges his death. (Trans.)

manumission before enslavement, nor orphanhood after maturity.'

كَذَّبَتْ ثَمُودُ بِالنُّذُرِ ﴿٢٣﴾

(54:23) *Thamūd denied the warnings* (nudhur)

The term *nudhur* here is either an infinitive, in which case this verse means, 'The people of Thamūd denied the warnings of their prophet Ṣāliḥ.' Alternatively, it could be the plural of *nadhīr* ('warner'), in which case it means: 'The people of Thamūd denied all of the prophets', because to deny one of the prophets is to deny all of them together and they all share one and the same message, and there is no difference between any of their teachings. This, then, is in the same vein as the verse, *Thamūd impugned the messengers* (26:141). Finally, it could be the plural of *nadhīr* (in the sense of 'warning'), in which case it could refer to either of the two above meanings.

فَقَالُوا أَبَشَرًا مِنَّا وَاحِدًا نَتَّبِعُهُ إِنَّا إِذًا لَفِي ضَلَالٍ وَسُعُرٍ ﴿٢٤﴾

(54:24) *and they said, 'Are we to follow a lone person* (wāḥid) *from ourselves? Indeed then we would be in error and madness* (suʿur).'

This adds details to their denial.

Suʿur is the plural of *saʿīr*, which literally means 'a blazing fire.' It could be used figuratively mean 'madness' (*junūn*), which is the most appropriate meaning for this context.

Wāḥid is used here in the sense of the count of one, meaning: 'They denied and said, "Is a man of our own species, a lone person without any numbers or followers. If we did that, we would surely be have strayed astonishingly into error and madness.'

They say this as an excuse for not following Ṣāliḥ, because—according to them—he had no numbers or power on his side, and they were used to following people of power and influence, such as kings and grandees. By contrast, Ṣāliḥ was calling on them to obey him and reject loyalty to their own grandees, as God recounts in the verse, *So be wary of Allah and obey me, and do not obey the dictates of the profligate* (26:151).

On the other hand, *wāḥid* may mean one in the sense of 'one of us.' In this vase, the meaning of the verse would be: 'Shall we follow a man who is one of us, of our species?'

The following verse expounds this further.

أَأُلْقِيَ الذِّكْرُ عَلَيْهِ مِنْ بَيْنِنَا بَلْ هُوَ كَذَّابٌ أَشِرٌ ﴿٢٥﴾

(54:25) ***'Has the Reminder been cast upon him from among us? Rather he is a self-conceited liar.'***

This question, like the one before it, is rhetorical with the force of a denial. It means: 'Out of all of us, has revelation been sent down to him exclusively, when he is no better than any of us? This is impossible!' According to some commentators, the use of the phrase '*cast upon him*' (*ilqā'*) rather than 'sent down' (*inzāl*) is to show that they believe this is something sudden and unexpected.

It seems that what they are rejecting is the idea that the Reminder has been cast upon one of their own people, a human like themselves. On the other hand, if the revelation was genuine and it was possible for it to be sent down to a human being, then all human beings would receive revelation. Therefore, why is it—so they ask—that only Ṣāliḥ received revelations from God and none of them? This is in the same vein as the verse, '*You are just a human being like us*' (26:154).

Rather he is a self-conceited liar: Meaning, he is extremely vain and arrogant and intends to aggrandize himself above us in this way.

سَيَعْلَمُونَ غَدًا مَنِ الْكَذَّابُ الْأَشِرُ ﴿٢٦﴾

(54:26) ***'Tomorrow they will know who is a self-conceited liar.'***

This are the words that God spoke to Ṣāliḥ, as are the following two verses.

'*Tomorrow*' here does not signify the literal meaning of 'the next day', but rather the outcome of an affair, akin to the Arabic adage, 'Today has a tomorrow.' Hence, God is saying that when the punishment befalls them they will realize with absolute certainty who is the self-conceited liar, Ṣāliḥ or them.

إِنَّا مُرْسِلُو النَّاقَةِ فِتْنَةً لَهُمْ فَارْتَقِبْهُمْ وَاصْطَبِرْ ﴿٢٧﴾

(54:27) ***'We are sending the She-camel as a trial* (fitna) *for them; so watch them and be steadfast.'***

This verse explains why the punishment prophesied in the previous verse will befall them, as in: 'The punishment will befall them because they did such and such.' The term *fitna* here is used in the sense of a test and an ordeal. Therefore, the meaning is as follows: 'We will send—as an inimitable

miracle—the she-camel which they have demanded as a test for them, so see what they do and be steadfast in the face of their persecution.

وَنَبِّئْهُمْ أَنَّ الْمَاءَ قِسْمَةٌ بَيْنَهُمْ ۖ كُلُّ شِرْبٍ مُحْتَضَرٌ ﴿٢٨﴾

(54:28) ***'Inform them that the water is to be dispensed between them; every drinking*** **(shirb)** ***will be attended.'***

The first instance of the pronoun '*them*' refers to Ṣāliḥ's people; the second instance refers to both them and the she-camel by way of grammatical preference (*taghlīb*).[1] The word *shirb* here denotes a share of the water. The meaning of the verse is: 'Make them aware that, after the she-camel has been sent, the water must be shared between them and the she-camel, both they and the she-camel will have their own turn to drink the water, so each should come when its turn is due.' As God says elsewhere, *He said, 'This is a she-camel; she shall drink and you shall drink on known days*' (26:155).

فَنَادَوْا صَاحِبَهُمْ فَتَعَاطَىٰ فَعَقَرَ ﴿٢٩﴾

(54:29) ***But they called their companion, and he took*** **(taʿāṭā)** ***and hamstrung*** **(ʿaqara).**

'Their companion' (*ṣāḥibahum*) refers to the one who hamstrung the she-camel, '*took*' means he took on the task of hamstringing her, then he hamstrung and killed her.

فَكَيْفَ كَانَ عَذَابِي وَنُذُرِ ﴿٣٠﴾ إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ صَيْحَةً وَاحِدَةً فَكَانُوا كَهَشِيمِ الْمُحْتَظِرِ ﴿٣١﴾

(54:30–31) ***So how were My punishment and My warnings?! We sent against them a single Cry, and they became like the dry sticks*** **(hashīm)** ***of a corral builder*** **(muḥtaẓir).**

A *muḥtaẓir* is someone who builds a pen (*ḥaẓīra*), which is an enclosure for the keeping of animals. The *hashīm* of a corral builder are the dried out

1 This is a mechanism in Arabic grammar whereby one of two interrelated things is preferred over the other, for example masculine over feminine, or rational over irrational. In this case, the she-camel is included in the third-person masculine plural pronoun 'them' (*hum*), even though this is normally reserved for rational beings. (Trans.)

branches or the like that he uses to build the pen for his animals. The rest of the meaning is clear.

وَلَقَدْ يَسَّرْنَا الْقُرْآنَ لِلذِّكْرِ فَهَلْ مِنْ مُدَّكِرٍ ﴿٣٢﴾

(54:32) ***Certainly We have made the Qur'an simple for the sake of remembrance. So is there anyone who will be reminded?***

This has already been explained previously.

كَذَّبَتْ قَوْمُ لُوطٍ بِالنُّذُرِ ﴿٣٣﴾

(54:33) ***And the people of Lot denied the warnings.***

The explanation of this is the same as that given above (54:23).

إِنَّا أَرْسَلْنَا عَلَيْهِمْ حَاصِبًا إِلَّا آلَ لُوطٍ ۖ نَجَّيْنَاهُمْ بِسَحَرٍ ﴿٣٤﴾

(54:34) ***We unleashed a rain of stones*** **(ḥāṣib)** ***upon them, excepting the family of Lot, whom We delivered at dawn*** **(bi saḥarin).**

The *ḥāṣib* ('rain of stones') refers to a powerful wind that carries rocks and pebbles. This is the wind that rained on them *stones of laminar shale* (11:82).

In *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, we read: '*Saḥarin*, when left indefinite, signifies "one morning at dawn." For example, if you were to say, "I saw Zayd *saḥaran*", this means that you saw him one morning. If you wished to say that you saw him this morning, you would say "I saw him *bi saḥari*" or "I came upon him *bi saḥari*" without the use of *tanwīn* (the -n sound at the end of an indefinite word).'

And the meaning of the verse is clear.

نِعْمَةً مِنْ عِنْدِنَا ۚ كَذَٰلِكَ نَجْزِي مَنْ شَكَرَ ﴿٣٥﴾

(54:35) ***As a blessing from Us*** **(niʿmatan).** ***Thus do We reward those who give thanks.***

The word *niʿmatan* (lit. 'a blessing') here is in the grammatical position of an object of purpose (*mafʿūl lahu*—meaning, the reason for which the action signified by the verb was performed) for the verb in the previous verse, '*We delivered*.' In other words, 'We delivered them so that this would be a special blessing from Us upon them because they were grateful to Us, and the recompense for gratitude is salvation.'

وَلَقَدْ أَنْذَرَهُمْ بَطْشَتَنَا فَتَمَارَوْا بِالنُّذُرِ ﴿٣٦﴾

(54:36) ***He had certainly warned them of Our violence*** **(baṭsha)*****, but they disputed*** **(tamārū)** ***the warnings.***

The pronoun '*he*' at the beginning of the verse refers to the prophet Lot, and *baṭsha* here signifies a severe punishment. *Tamārī* means to argue stubbornly and obstinately cling to doubt. Therefore, the meaning of the verse is: 'I swear that Lot cautioned them about our severe punishment, but they disputed his warnings and his cautions.'

وَلَقَدْ رَاوَدُوهُ عَنْ ضَيْفِهِ فَطَمَسْنَا أَعْيُنَهُمْ فَذُوقُوا عَذَابِي وَنُذُرِ ﴿٣٧﴾

(54:37) ***Certainly they even solicited*** **(rāwadū)** ***of him his guests, whereat We blotted out their eyes, 'Taste My punishment and My warnings*** **(nudhur)*****!'***

The verb *rāwadū* ('they solicited') means they demanded that he turn over his guests to them, and these guests were, in fact, angels. '*We blotted out their eyes*' means that God blinded them. Note that the tone shifts suddenly such that God is addressing the people of Lot directly, *'Taste My punishment and My warnings!'* This conveys His wrath and rebuke. Note that the infinitive *nudhur* ('warnings') here refers to what they were warned of, which is the severe punishment.

The meaning of the verse is otherwise clear.

وَلَقَدْ صَبَّحَهُمْ بُكْرَةً عَذَابٌ مُسْتَقِرٌّ ﴿٣٨﴾

(54:38) ***Certainly early at dawn*** **(bukratan)** ***there visited them an abiding*** **(mustaqirr)** ***punishment***

In *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, we read: 'The word *bukratan* ('early at dawn') is an adverb of time. If it was definite (that is, *al-bukra*), it would be referring to dawn the very next day. However, here it is indefinite, which means it befell them at a future dawn. The punishment is described as *mustaqirr* ('abiding') to show that neither were they spared, nor did the punishment cease.

فَذُوقُوا عَذَابِي وَنُذُرِ ﴿٣٩﴾ وَلَقَدْ يَسَّرْنَا الْقُرْآنَ لِلذِّكْرِ فَهَلْ مِنْ مُدَّكِرٍ ﴿٤٠﴾

(54:39–40) ***'Taste My punishment and My warnings!' Certainly We have made the Qur'an simple for the sake of remembrance.***

So is there anyone who will be reminded?

These verses have already been explained, above.

وَلَقَدْ جَاءَ آلَ فِرْعَوْنَ النُّذُرُ ﴿٤١﴾ كَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا كُلِّهَا فَأَخَذْنَاهُمْ أَخْذَ عَزِيزٍ مُقْتَدِرٍ ﴿٤٢﴾

(54:41–42) ***Certainly the warnings came to Pharaoh's clan. They denied all of Our signs. So We seized them with the seizing of One all-mighty, Omnipotent.***

Note that there is no conjunction (such as 'and' or 'then') between the two verses. This is because the second verse, '*They denied all of our signs...*' is the answer to an implicit question that is posed in response to the first verse. As if to say:

Certainly the warnings came to Pharaoh's clan

Q: Then what did they do?

A: *They denied all of Our signs*

Then, as a result of their denial, *We seized them with the seizing of One all-mighty, Omnipotent*.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *Rūḥ al-maʿānī*, about the verse, *Certainly We have made the Qur'an simple for the sake of remembrance. So is there anyone who will be reminded?* (54:17), it is narrated from Ibn Abī Ḥātim, from Ibn ʿAbbās: 'Were it not for the fact that God had made it easy for the tongue of the children of Adam, none of the creation would have been able to pronounce the words of God.'

(2) In the same source, a similar narration is narrated by al-Daylamī, via an incomplete chain of narrators (*marfūʿ*), from Anas. Then al-Ālūsī remarks: 'If the report of Anas is correct, perhaps it is not an exposition of the verse.'

Author's comments: It is not unlikely that the meaning of this tradition matches the second of the explanations we presented for this verse, above.

(3) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, about the verse, *Then We opened the gates of the sky with pouring waters* (54:11), we read: 'Meaning that they poured forth as a torrent, without droplets.' *And We made the earth burst forth with springs and the water met* (54:12)—'the water of the sky

and the water of the earth'—*for a preordained purpose. We bore him*—'Noah'—*on a vessel made of planks and nails*—'The planks and nails of the boat.'

(4) In the same source, about the verse *But they called their companion* (54:29), we read: 'Qudār, who hamstrung the she-camel'— *like the dry sticks* (54:31)—'grass and branches.'

(5) In *al-Kāfī*, al-Kulaynī narrates from Abū Yazīd from Imām al-Ṣādiq in a lengthy tradition in which he discussed the story of the people of Lot: 'They were disdainful of him—Lot—to the point where they entered his home. Gabriel called out to him and said, 'O Lot! Pay them no mind!' And when they entered his home, Gabriel stretched out his fingers towards them, whereat they went blind. This is God's saying, *whereat We blotted out their eyes* (54:37).

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Verses 43–55

These verses draw a conclusion from the warnings found in the stories of past nations recounted in the previous section. This takes the form of an account of the Final Judgement first before returning to the fates of past nations who have been destroyed by God. After discussing their fates, it addresses the Prophet's own people and tells them that their disbelievers are not superior, nor mightier than those disobedient and arrogant nations God had destroyed in the most humiliating and demeaning manner, and that they will not be excuses from God's punishment, nor will their numbers provide them with any protection from the consequences of their actions. Then it turns back to the prophecies of the Final Judgement and warns them that this is the hardship that awaits them in the future, and that by denying it and persisting in their sinfulness they are only making the punishment harsher and more bitter. With this, the chapter draws to a close.

أَكُفَّارُكُمْ خَيْرٌ مِنْ أُولَٰئِكُمْ أَمْ لَكُمْ بَرَاءَةٌ فِي الزُّبُرِ ﴿٤٣﴾

(54:43) ***Are your faithless better than those, or have you some immunity in the scriptures?***

It appears that this is addressed to the Prophet's own people, both Muslims and disbelievers, because the verses uses the expression, '*your faithless*.' And '*better*' (*khayr*) here refers to being better in the affairs of this world and its vanities of worldly life, such as wealth and children. Alternatively it could refer to being better in civic virtues, such as generosity, bravery, and compassion for the weak. Meanwhile, '*those*' refers to the past nations mentioned in the previous section, the peoples of Noah, ʿĀd, Thamūd, Lot, and the people of Pharaoh. This is a rhetorical question, intended to evoke a denial.

The meaning of the verse is: 'Those of you who disbelieve are not superior to those nations who were punished and destroyed before you and, therefore, they will not be spared punishment.'

It is also possible that '*your faithless*' shows that the verse is addressed specifically to the disbelievers of the Prophet's people, rather than both the believers and disbelievers, considering that many of the Prophet's own people were disbelievers, and they are the main concern of this passage.

... or have you some immunity in the scriptures (zubur)? This also appears to be addressed to the Prophet's people generally.

The word *zubur* is the plural of *zabūr*, which refers to a book. Scholars have said that *zabūr* specifically refers to books of divine revelation sent down to the prophets.

Therefore, the meaning of this passage is: 'Rather, do you have some immunity granted to you in the divine books that were sent down by God, which grants you protection from His punishment or His judgement for your actions if you persist in your disbelief and go on sinning.'

أَمْ يَقُولُونَ نَحْنُ جَمِيعٌ مُنْتَصِرٌ ﴿٤٤﴾

(54:44) *Do they say, 'We are a confederate league* (jamīʿ muntaṣir)*'?*

Jamīʿ ('league') is a group and the term is used here to emphasise their unity in decision and action, *muntaṣir* ('confederate') is derived from *intiṣār*, meaning either 'revenge' or 'mutual assistance.' One of the things that will be told to the disbelievers on the Day of Resurrection is, *'Why is it that you do not support one another* (tanāṣarūn)*?'* (37:25)

The meaning of this verse is: 'Rather, do the disbelievers say, "We are a people of considerable numbers who are united and who will exact revenge on anyone who wishes to do us harm *or* who will support one another and never be driven off."'

سَيُهْزَمُ الْجَمْعُ وَيُوَلُّونَ الدُّبُرَ ﴿٤٥﴾

(54:45) *The league will be routed and turn its back*

Meaning: 'The league in which the disbelievers place so much confidence will be defeated, turn its back, and flee.'

This verse prophecies that they will be defeated and routed in a war that they will initiate, as happened at the Battle of Badr. This is one of the prophecies the Qur'an makes in its verses about the future.

بَلِ السَّاعَةُ مَوْعِدُهُمْ وَالسَّاعَةُ أَدْهَىٰ وَأَمَرُّ ﴿٤٦﴾

(54:46) *Rather the Hour is their tryst; and the Hour will be more calamitous and bitter* (amarr wa adhā).

The word *adhā* ('most calamitous') is the superlative form of *dahā'* and denotes a grave misfortune from which there is no means of escape, while

amarr is the superlative of *marāra*, which denotes the opposite of sweet. This verse turns from threatening them with defeat and worldly punishment to threatening them with the fate that awaits them on the Day of Resurrection, which had also been alluded to in the previous section of verses, suggesting that the first leads to the second.

Therefore, the meaning of the verse is as follows: 'Being defeated and suffering worldly punishment is not the extent of their punishment, rather the Final Judgement, whose events We have already foretold, is their destination, and the Final Judgement is more calamitous than any calamity and more bitter than any bitterness.'

إِنَّ الْمُجْرِمِينَ فِي ضَلَالٍ وَسُعُرٍ ﴿٤٧﴾

(54:47) ***Indeed the guilty are in error and blazes*** **(su'ur)**

Su'ur is the plural of *sa'īr*, which denotes a raging fire.

This verse explains why *the Hour will be more calamitous and bitter*.

Therefore, the meaning is: 'The hour will be more calamitous and bitter because they are guilty and the guilty have strayed from the path leading to everlasting felicity, which is paradise, and into a blazing fire.'

يَوْمَ يُسْحَبُونَ فِي النَّارِ عَلَىٰ وُجُوهِهِمْ ذُوقُوا مَسَّ سَقَرَ ﴿٤٨﴾

(54:48) ***The day when they are dragged into the Fire on their faces, 'Taste the touch of hell*** **(saqar)*!'***

The day is an adverb of place for the phrase *in error and blazes*, from the previous verse. *Saqar* is one of the names for hell in Arabic, '*the touch*' of hell is its heat and torment afflicting them.

Therefore, the meaning is: 'They will be in error and blazes on the day they are dragged into the Fire on their faces and told: "Taste the heat and torment of hell!"'

إِنَّا كُلَّ شَيْءٍ خَلَقْنَاهُ بِقَدَرٍ ﴿٤٩﴾

(54:49) ***Indeed We have created everything with a measure*** **(bi qadar)**

A thing's *qadar* is the extent beyond which it does not exceed, and its limit and shape from which it does not deviate, whether by excess or deficiency. Elsewhere in the Qur'an, God says, *There is not a thing but that its sources*

are with Us, and We do not send it down except in a known measure (bi qadar maʿlūm) (15:21). Therefore, each thing has a specified limit inherent to its creation that it does not overstep, and a course laid out for its being to traverse from which it does not diverge.

This verse explains the rationale for the two preceding verses about the state of the guilty on the Day of Resurrection, as if someone had asked, 'Why are the guilty recompensed with error and blazes on the Day of Resurrection and made to taste the touch of hell?' And God responded by saying, *Indeed We have created everything with a measure*, meaning that each and every thing has a measure, and part of the measure of the human being is that God created them as a species that multiplies over the generations and forms communities and societies in the course of their worldly lives. It is in these communities that they take provisions from this transient worldly existence for their everlasting life in the world that is to come. It is also decreed, as part of this measure, that messengers should be sent to them in order to call them to the way leading to happiness in this world and the next. Whoever answers this call will find happiness, enter paradise, and be lodged near their Lord. However, anyone who rejects this call and carries on sinning will find themselves in error and hellfire.

Now, one might argue that responding to the question in this way is to commit the fallacy of begging the question (*al-muṣādira*), because the question posed was why God punishes them for their sins with hellfire. Therefore, the meaning of the question is: 'Why has God decreed that the guilty should be punished with hellfire?' The meaning of the answer given above is, 'Because God has decreed that the guilty should be punished with hellfire.' Alternatively, the meaning of the question is: 'Why has God consigned them to hell?' And the meaning of the answer is: 'Because God has consigned them to hell.' This is a patent case of begging the question.

However, this argument is incorrect because there is a qualitative difference between human actions and divine ones. As human beings, we base our own actions on universal laws and principles that we derive from objective reality and entified existence, and these govern our decisions and our behaviors. When we eat because we are hungry or drink because we are thirsty, we only do so in order to be satiated or quenched, because our experience of the external world has taught us that eating will satiate our hunger and drinking will quench our thirst. This also forms the basis for how we answer questions about our motivations for performing certain actions.

In short, our behavior as human beings is based on certain universal rules and general criteria that are derived and abstracted from entified existence.

On the other hand, God's actions are identical with entified existence, and the universal rational principles upon which we base our own decisions are, in fact, derived from this existence and, therefore, posterior to God's actions and patterned upon them. Therefore, these same principles cannot be used to judge His own actions, when these are ontologically posterior to them. God says in the Qur'an, *He is not questioned concerning what He does, but they are questioned* (21:23); and elsewhere, He says, *Indeed Allah does whatever He wishes* (22:18), and *The truth is from your Lord* (3:60).

Therefore, it is impossible to ask 'why' God did something if, by this, we are searching for an external cause to explain His behavior, as there is no cause external to Him to influence His action, as all existence is His act. Therefore, it is meaningless to ask for a universal rational principle which can validate His actions, as universal rational principles are derived from His actions and, therefore, posterior to them.

Instead, when God seeks to provide a rationale for His actions, this takes one of three forms:

First: Explaining the rationale for the act based on the outcomes or benefits it achieves for His creatures (not for Him). However, it must be noted that such a rationale provides the reason for the action, not for God performing that action, but rather in the sense for why this action exists in the chain of cause and effect. We can see this sort of rationale at play in the following verses: *...and surely you will find the nearest of them in affection to the faithful to be those who say 'We are Christians.' That is because there are priests and monks among them, and because they are not arrogant* (5:83); *...So they were struck with abasement and poverty, and they earned Allah's wrath. That, because they would defy the signs of Allah and kill the prophets unjustly. That, because they would disobey and used to commit transgression* (2:61).

Second: Explaining the rationale for the act through God's names and attributes that are most appropriate to it, something which we can observe in many verses of the Qur'an. For example, when He says, *Indeed Allah is all-forgiving, all-merciful* (5:39), or *and He is the All-mighty, the All-wise* (45:37), or *And He is the All-attentive, the All-aware* (67:14). The Qur'an is replete with examples of this sort of rationale being given for God's actions. When we ponder on this, we see that God explains His actions by invoking a specific attribute (*ṣifa*) derived from a general attribute. This is because the Divine Names that pertain to God's specific actions are derived from His general acts. Therefore, when He gives one of His attributes of names as the rationale for an act of His, He is explaining a specific aspect of His actions through a

general aspect of His being. For example, see the verse: *How many an animal there is that does not carry its own provision. Allah provides for it, and for you, and He is the All-hearing, the All-knowing* (29:60). In this verse, God says that He provides for the needs of animals and humans, which they ask for through the language of their innate needs, because He is all-hearing and all-knowing. In other words, He created everything and their requests are heard by Him and their states are known to Him. Hence, the names all-hearing (*samīʿ*) and all-knowing (*ʿalīm*) in this verse are examples of His general attributes being used to explain a specific action. Consider also the verse, *Then Adam received certain words from his Lord, and He turned to him clemently. Indeed He is the All-clement, the All-merciful* (2:37), where God explains His acceptance of Adam's repentance by saying that He is all-clement (*tawwāb*) and all-merciful (*raḥīm*), in other words the attributes that governed His action of accepting Adam's repentance was His clemency and mercy.

Third: Explaining the rationale for one of God's specific act through one of His general ones. In reality, this devolve to the previous form of explanation. One example of this can be seen in the verse, *Indeed the guilty are in error and flames... Indeed We have created everything in a measure* (54:49). In this verse, 'measure' (*qadr*)—which denotes a thing's limitations which it does not overstep in the course of its existence—refers to a general act of God, from which nothing in creation is exempt. Therefore, when God attributes divine punishment to this measure, this is an instance of explaining a specific act of His (divine punishment) through a general act (measurement), and indicates that this specific act of punishing the guilty is a form of measurement. This is because it is part of man's nature is that when he sins by rejecting the call of the prophets, he will enter hellfire on the Day of Resurrection. Another example is the verse, *There is none of you but will come to it: a decided certainty with your Lord* (19:71)—here, the specific act of people being brought to Hellfire is explained through the general act of God's divine decree.

Therefore, it is evident that the Qur'an explains God's specific actions through His general divine attributes, and the explanation given here is at the level of subsistence (*thubūt*) rather than that of demonstration (*ithbāt*) and, therefore, is not a case of begging the question.

وَمَا أَمْرُنَا إِلَّا وَاحِدَةٌ كَلَمْحٍ بِالْبَصَرِ ﴿٥٠﴾

(54:50) *and Our command* (amr) *is but a single thing* (wāḥida), *like the twinkling of an eye*

'The twinkling of an eye' refers to a momentary glance or the blink of an eye.

The meaning of *amr* ('command') here is the opposite of prohibition, rather than that of 'affair.' However, the variety of command being referred to here is a creative command (*amr takwīnī*), rather than a legislative one. This is what is referred to in the verse, *All His command, when He wills something, is to say to it 'Be,' and it is* (36:82). Therefore, '*command*' in this verse refers to the divine word 'Be', and perhaps the reason why the predicate in this verse, '*a single thing*' is feminine is because it is referring to a 'word' (*kalima*) and, therefore, is in grammatical agreement with it.

Based on the context and tone of the verse, when the Qur'an describes God's command as '*a single thing*', it means that God does not need to repeat Himself or issue multiple commands to achieve its desired outcome. Instead, all that is required is a single command in the form of the divine word, '*Be*' and that this by itself is sufficient for its outcome to be achieved in the blink of an eye, without delay or hesitation, such that God would need to repeat the command twice or thrice.

Comparing God's command to the twinkling of an eye here is in reference to the speed with which its desired outcome is realized, rather than to suggest that its effect endures for no longer than a blink. Therefore, it means that there is no delay, however short, in the divine command being accomplished in reality: God's command—which is His bringing things into being and willing their existence—does not require either time, nor space, nor movement to be effective. How can it be otherwise, when time, place, and movement only exist by God's commands in the first place.

Therefore, this verse conveys a universal truth about the creation of things, namely that their existence, insofar as they are all acts of God, is like the blink of an eye, even though these things come into being and pass away gradually in objective reality.

However, within the context of threatening the disbelievers with divine punishment on the Day of Judgement, this verse conveys the fact that the setting-in of the Hour requires but a single command from God Almighty, and that this alone is sufficient for bringing about the Day of Judgement and renewing the creation through Resurrection. Therefore, this verse is like an addendum for what has already been established in the previous verse, *Indeed We have created everything in a measure*.

وَلَقَدْ أَهْلَكْنَا أَشْيَاعَكُمْ فَهَلْ مِنْ مُدَّكِرٍ ﴿٥١﴾

(54:51) ***Certainly We have destroyed your likes*** **(ashyāʿ)*****. So is there anyone who will be admonished?***

Ashyāʿ ('likes') is the plural of *shīʿa*, which some scholars have interpreted to mean 'those of past nations who are akin to you in disbelief and denying the Prophets.'

The purpose of this verse and the two subsequent verses is to affirm the proof laid out in the earlier verses that the divine punishment will encompass them without any doubt.

Therefore, the meaning of this verse is as follows: 'The warnings that We have delivered to you about the punishment of this world and the punishment of the Hour are not merely empty claims We are conveying to you. Just look at those who were like you from earlier nations and what became of them: We have destroyed them in this world with Our punishment and they will encountered Our punishment in the Hereafter as well. Their actions are inscribed in the records of their deeds that are preserved with Us, and We will hold them to account and requite them for what they have done in their worldly lives.

وَكُلُّ شَيْءٍ فَعَلُوهُ فِي الزُّبُرِ ﴿٥٢﴾ وَكُلُّ صَغِيرٍ وَكَبِيرٍ مُسْتَطَرٌ ﴿٥٣﴾

(54:52–53) ***Everything they have done is in the books*** **(zubur)*****, and everything big and small, is committed to writing***

Zubur ('books') refers to the records of peoples' deeds; it is foolish to interpret this as a reference to the Guarded Tablet (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ*), while—based on the context—'*big and small*' refers to minor deeds and major ones.

إِنَّ الْمُتَّقِينَ فِي جَنَّاتٍ وَنَهَرٍ ﴿٥٤﴾

(54:54) ***Indeed the Godwary will be amid gardens and streams*** **(nahar)**

In other words, they will be amid grand gardens too magnificent to describe, and steams likewise. Some have said that *nahar* refers to expansiveness and openness.

فِي مَقْعَدِ صِدْقٍ عِنْدَ مَلِيكٍ مُقْتَدِرٍ ﴿٥٥﴾

(54:55) ***in the abode*** **(maqʿad)** ***of truthfulness*** **(ṣidq)** ***with an omnipotent Sovereign*** **(malīk muqtadir)**

Maʿqad ('abode') is synonymous with *majlis* ('court', 'assembly'), while some scholars have said that *malīk* is the hyperbolic form of *malik* ('king'), and *muqtadir* means one who is of immense power—hence, '*an omnipotent Sovereign*' is a reference to God Almighty.

'*Truthfulness*' in this verse refers to the truthfulness of the Godwary in their belief and action. This is associated with '*abode*', possibly because it is where they reside because of their truthfulness, which is unpolluted by dishonesty. Hence, they are ever present in this abode and never absent, ever near to God and never far, ever blessed and never cursed, ever happy and never miserable, everlasting and never fading.

'*Truthfulness*' could also refer to the veracity of these prophecies, in the sense that they contain glad tidings and a beautiful promise of reward from God. Therefore, this draws a kind of contrast between the description of the fate of the Godwary with that of the guilty: The guilty have been threatened with punishment and going astray, on account of this being part of the irrevocable divine determination (*qadar*), and the Godwary have been promised a glorious reward and proximity to their Lord, the Omnipotent Sovereign, on account of this being truthfulness without any deception therein.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *Kamāl al-Dīn*, Shaykh al-Ṣadūq narrates via a chain of narrators from ʿAlī b. Sālim from Imām al-Ṣādiq: 'I asked him about charms (*ruqan*), do they have any effect on the divine determination (*qadar*)?' He said: 'They are part of the divine determination.' He also said: 'Surely the Qadariyya are the Magians of this nation—they are the ones who wish to maintain God's justice but, in doing so, deprive Him of His authority. It is about them that the verse was revealed, *The day when they are dragged into the Fire on their faces, 'Taste the touch of hell!' Indeed We have created everything in a measure* (54:48–49).'

Author's comments: Here, 'the Qadariyya' denotes those who negate predestination—meaning the Muʿtazila, who adhere to the doctrine of the delegation of free-will (*tafwīḍ*). When the Imām describes them as 'the Magians of this nation' (*majūs hādhihi al-umma*), this is because when they say, 'the creator of volitional acts (*afʿāl ikhtiyāriyya*) is the human being, and God is the creator of everything besides this', they espouse dualism by affirming the existence of two deities, just as the Magians affirmed the existence of two deities; the creator of good and the creator of evil.

As for when the Imām says that they 'wish to maintain God's justice (*ʿadl*) but, in doing so, deprive Him of His authority (*sulṭān*)', this is because they say that the human being is the creator of his own deeds in order to avoid espousing the doctrine of predestination (*jabr*), which runs contrary to that of divine justice (*ʿadl*). However, by saying this, they deprive God of His authority (*sulṭān*) over the actions of His servants by negating any connection between them and Him.

As for when the Imām says that this verse was revealed about them, this means that its meaning applies to them (*jarī*) rather than they being the cause of its revelation (*sabab al-nuzūl*) or its original concern. After all, as you will recall from our commentary on it, the verse is general in meaning based on its context. There are other narrations that speak about verses being revealed concerning the Qadariyya from Imām al-Bāqir and Imām al-Ṣādiq. There are also narrations in Sunnī sources with the same meaning narrated from Ibn ʿAbbās, Ibn ʿUmar, Muḥammad b. Kaʿb and others.

(2) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, al-Suyūṭī quotes from Aḥmad, who narrates from Hudhayfa b. al-Yamān, from the Messenger of God: 'Every nation contains a group of Magians, and the Magians of this nation are the ones who say, "No determinism" (*lā qadra*).'

Author's comments: Al-Ṣadūq narrates in *Thawāb al-aʿmāl*, via a chain of narrators going back to Imām al-Ṣādiq, from his forefathers, from ʿAlī, a similar tradition: 'Every nation contains a group of Magians, and the Magians of this nation are those who say, "No determinism" (*lā qadra*).'

(3) In the same source, al-Suyūṭī quotes Ibn Mardawayh, who narrates via a chain of transmitters going back to Ibn ʿAbbās, that the Messenger of God said: '*Nahr* (in 54:54) means expansiveness and broadness, rather than a flowing stream.'

(4) In the same source, he quotes Abū Naʿīm, narrating from Jābir: 'The Messenger of God was amongst us in the Mosque of Medina. Some of his Companions brought up the topic of Paradise, so the Prophet said: "O Abū Dujāna, do you not know that whoever loves us and faces trials and tribulations for it will be lodged by God with us in the Hereafter?" Then he recited the verse, *in the abode of truthfulness with an omnipotent Sovereign* (54:55).'

(5) In *Rūḥ al-maʿānī*, concerning the phrase, *in the abode of truthfulness*, it is narrated from Imām Jaʿfar al-Ṣādiq: 'The place is praised for its truthfulness, because no one but the truthful will be able to sit in it.'

A Discussion on the Meaning of *Qadar* (Determination)

A thing's *qadar* is its shape and the limits of its existence. God has repeatedly mentioned this term in the Qur'an in relation to the matter of creation. For example, He says, *There is not a thing but that its sources are with Us, and We do not send it down except in a known measure* (qadar maʿlūm) (15:21). It appears that the idea of *qadar* in this verse is associated with things as they are sent down from the repositories of being that exist with God. As for the repositories themselves, which are undoubtedly originated by God, these are not subject to the same *qadar*, as this measuring out is concomitant with things being sent down from these repositories—meaning their issuance forth into the material world, as per the verses: ... *and We sent down iron* ... (57:25); ... *and He has sent down for you eight mates of the cattle* ... (39:6).

This is supported by explanations of *qadar* in terms of length, breadth, and other measurements and physical qualities. For example, in *al-Maḥāsin*, al-Barqī narrates from hi father, from Yūnus, from Imām al-Riḍā: 'Nothing will be except for what God wishes (*shā'*), wills (*arād*), determines (*qadar*), and decrees (*qaḍā*).'

Yūnus asked him, 'What does it mean for Him wish a thing?'

He said, 'To initiate the act (*ibtadā' al-fiʿl*).'

Yūnus asked, 'What does it mean for Him to will a thing?'

He said, 'To give it substance (*al-thubūt ʿalayh*).'

Yūnus asked, 'What does it mean for Him to determine a thing?'

He said, 'To measure its length and breadth.'

Yūnus asked, 'What does it mean for Him to decree a thing?'

He said, 'When He decrees, He brings it about. There is no avoiding this.'

Al-Barqī narrates a detailed tradition with the same meaning from his father, from Ibn Abī 'Umayr, from Muḥammad b. Isḥāq, from Imām al-Riḍā, in which he says: 'Do you know the meaning of *qadar*?'

Muḥammad b. Isḥāq said, 'No.'

He said, 'It is the shape of a thing: It's length, breadth, and subsistence (*baqā'*).'

Based on the above, we can now consider the meaning of the term 'everything' (*kulla shay'*) in the verses:

... *and He created everything and determined it in a precise measure* (fa qaddarahu taqdīran) ... (25:2);

Indeed We have created everything in a measure (qadar) (54:49);

and everything is by measure (miqdār) *with Him* (13:8);

He said, 'Our Lord is He who gave everything its creation and then guided it' (20:50);

The meaning of 'everything' in these verses are those composite physical entities that exist in our material world (*al-'alam al-mashhūd*) under the rubric of creation (*khalq*). These verses further suggest that there are two levels to God's determination or measurement (*taqdīr*), the level which encompasses everything other than God, which limits the principle of a thing's existence with contingency (*imkān*) and ontological need (*hāja*). This encompasses all beings besides God, which is what He refers to in the verse, *To Allah belongs whatever is in the heavens and whatever is on the earth, and Allah encompasses all things* (4:126).

Then, there is the level of determination and measurement that is specific to the material realm we inhabit, which limits the existence of beings according to their existence, their effects, and their qualities. These are dependent in both their existence and effects on external factors such as causes and conditions. Therefore, they differ in their existence and their states of being according to the different causes and factors that affect them. Therefore, they are moved by internal and external factors that determine their breadth, length, form, shape, and all of the other states and behaviors that befit them.

Therefore, divine determination (*taqdīr*) guides this species of beings to the destiny appointed for them in the arc of their being. God says, *who created and proportioned, who determined and guided* (87:2–3). In other words, He guides what He created to what He had determined for them, then He fulfilled this by enacting the divine decree (*qaḍā'*). This is the meaning of the verse about the human being, *He has created him from a drop of fluid, and then proportioned him. Then He made the way easy for him* (80:19–20). The phrase, *Then He made the way easy for him*, shows that this does not contradict the ability of the human being to exercise free-will in his volitional acts.

Now, this kind of determination (*qadar*) is, in itself, distinct from the divine decree (*qaḍā'*), which is the inexorable divine ordinance that is referred to in the verses, *Allah judges, and there is none who may repeal His judgement, and He is swift at reckoning* (13:41); and, *For any verse that We abrogate or remove from memories, We bring another which is better than it, or similar to it* (2:106). Perhaps God determines (*qadar*) and then follows this by issuing a decree (*qaḍā'*), as when He determines the existence of something from every angle, through the confluence of the existence of all of its causes and conditions and the removal of all obstacles to its being. It is to this that the Imām most likely refers in the tradition narrated in *al-Maḥāsin*, when he says: 'When

He decrees, He brings it about. There is no avoiding this.' A similar tradition is found in a number of reports about the divine decree and determination (*al-qaḍā' wa al-qadar*), which state that the divine determination (*qadar*) can be repealed, but the decree (*qaḍā'*) cannot.

And there is a tradition narrated from Imām ʿAlī via various chains of transmission. For example, in *al-Tawḥīd*, Shaykh al-Ṣadūq narrates via a chain going back to Ibn Nabāta that one day, the Commander of the Faithful went from standing beside a wall that was about to collapse to another wall. Someone asked him, 'O Commander of the Faithful, are you trying to escape God's decree?' He answered, 'I flee from God's decree to His determination (*afirru min qaḍā' Allāh ilā qadr Allāh*).'

As for the first kind of beings, whose existence is circumscribed by contingency and ontological need, then God's decree and His determination are one and the same, as His determination does not differ from what obtains in objective reality.

What we have discussed above is supported by rational inquiry, as all entities with causes are made from a combination of an agent, matter, conditions, preliminaries, and obstacles, as each of these things has an effect on the entity in accordance with its own nature. Therefore, it is like a mould into which the thing is poured, such that it takes the shape of this mould and receives its features. This is God's determination (*qadar*). On the other hand, it is the thing's sufficient cause (*ʿilla tāmma*) that, when all of its parts are gathered, imparts necessity to the thing's existence. This is the divine decree (*qaḍā'*) that cannot be avoided. It will be useful for readers to refer to our discussion of *qaḍā'* at the beginning of Sūrah al-Isrā' (Chapter 17) to understand this further.

End of Chapter 54

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Chapter 55

Sūrah al–Raḥmān ('The Beneficent')

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بِسۡمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the most Merciful, the most Compassionate

Verses 1–29

This chapter of the Qur'an calls the audience's attention to God's creation in all of its parts—the heavens and the earth, the land and the sea, the humans and the jinn—and the arrangement of these parts in such a way that the two species of humans and jinn benefit from them in their lives. In this way, the cosmos is divided into two stages of creation (*nash'atān*): The creation of this world (*nash'a dunyā*), which will pass away along with its inhabitants, and the creation of the next world (*nash'a ukhrā*), which will endure, and in which felicity will be utterly distinct from misery, and blessings from afflictions.

On this basis, it is apparent that the cosmos—in both its this-worldly and next-worldly aspects—is governed by a single order that unifies its parts and brings together its components, and that this order rests on firm and mutually-supporting foundations, such that each part complements and completes the other.

So, all that this world contains, in both its causes and its effects, are the blessings and bounties of God, and for this reason, this chapter of the Qur'an repeatedly poses a question mixed with a rebuke, namely: 'Which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?' This question is repeated a total of thirty-one times in this chapter.

This is why the chapter begins by invoking God with the attribute of His universal and all-encompassing mercy (*raḥma*), which envelops the believer and the disbeliever in this world and the next world without discrimination[1],

1 The name *al-Raḥmān* encompasses not only the worldly blessings received by both believers and disbelievers, but also the blessings exclusive to the believers in the hereafter. (Auth.)

and concludes by celebrating His praise with the words: *Blessed is the name of your Lord, the Lord of majesty and honour!*

This chapter could be either Meccan or Medinan in its revelation, although it is closest to the Meccan chapters in style. It is also the only chapter of the Qur'an to open with one of the divine names immediately after the *bismillāh*. In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, it is narrated from Imām Mūsā b. Jaʿfar, from his forefathers, from the Prophet, who said: 'Everything has its bride, and the bride of the Qur'an is Sūrah al-Raḥmān!' And the same tradition is narrated in *al-Durr al-Manthūr* from al-Bayhaqī, from ʿAlī, from the Prophet.

الرَّحْمَٰنُ ﴿١﴾ عَلَّمَ الْقُرْآنَ ﴿٢﴾

(55:1–2) ***The All-beneficent has taught the Qur'an.***

As has already been discussed in the explanation of Sūrah al-Fātiḥa, the divine name 'the All-beneficent' (*al-Raḥmān*) is a noun in the hyperbolic form (*ṣīghat al-mubālagha*)—a form which intensifies the meaning of its etymological root. In this case, *al-Raḥmān* signifies an abundance of mercy (*raḥma*) through the generous giving of blessings. As such, this name encompasses not only the worldly blessings received by both believers and disbelievers, but also the blessings exclusive to the believers in the hereafter. It is this divine name's universality that makes it fitting to invoke at the outset of the present chapter of the Qur'an, as this chapter focuses on expounding the various blessings which God bestows on His creatures in this world and the next and by which the worlds of the two species of men and jinn are given order and direction.

Scholars have said that the name *al-Raḥmān* is one of God's exclusive names, meaning that it cannot be applied to any other being. This contrasts with other names such as *al-Raḥīm* ('Most-merciful') or *al-Rāḥim* ('Merciful'), which can be used for others.

God begins the enumeration of His blessings with '*has taught the Qur'an*' because the Qur'an is the greatest of His blessings in terms of both its magnitude and importance, and it is the loftiest of them in status; it is the direct speech of God, which points to the straight path and contains a clear explanation of the way that leads to felicity. In short, it represents the highest ambition that anyone might hope for and the utmost desire that anyone might ask for. That is why the teaching of the Qur'an is mentioned before all the other blessings listed in this chapter, even before the creation of the jinn and humankind, for whose benefit and education the Qur'an was ultimately revealed.

Notice that the verse does not explicitly mention who is being taught the

Qur'an, namely 'humankind' or 'humankind and the jinn.' So, the full meaning of the verse could be either '...taught humankind the Qur'an' or '...taught humankind and the jinn the Qur'an.' And although the Qur'an's commentators have not discussed the second of these possibilities, the latter appears to be the more likely of the two. This is by virtue of the fact that the present chapter of the Qur'an addresses humankind and the jinn together through the use of the dual form in all of its verses. If the verse '...taught the Qur'an' meant only 'to humankind,' then it would not be correct to mention it as a blessing to both the jinn and humankind through the use of this duality.

Some have said that this verse means God taught Prophet Muḥammad or Gabriel the Qur'an, but the most appropriate reading is the one presented above.

خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ ۝٣ عَلَّمَهُ الْبَيَانَ ۝٤

(55:3–4) ***He created man, taught him articulate speech.***

God mentions the creation of the human being here, and He will explain a particular aspect of this creation in a subsequent verse: *He created man out of dry clay, like the potter's*. The human being is one of God's most wondrous creations, or in fact the most wondrous of them all, as is apparent when we compare his existence to the existence of other creatures and consider how the path to perfection has been laid out for him in his outward and inward aspects and in his worldly and next-worldly lives. God says: *We certainly created man in the best of forms; then We relegated him to the lowest of the low, except those who have faith and do righteous deeds* (95:4–6).

When God says: *taught him articulate speech* (bayān), the term *bayān* literally means 'to uncover something,' and here it denotes the power to uncover what is in one's own mind. This is one of the most profound of God's blessings, and the fact that God taught this to the human being demonstrates the great care that God has for humanity.

Now, speech does not mean merely the process of bringing a sound into being using the lungs, trachea, and throat, nor even the variety of sounds that can be produced in the throat through the use of the various articulation points found in the mouth. On the contrary, the human being, having been granted innate inspiration by God, can take one of the sounds produced by one of these articulation points in their mouth—which is called a letter—or combine several of these letters and make them into a sign that refers to a particular concept, which represents something that is absent from the listener's

senses or perception. In doing so, the speaker can summon to the mind of the listener any object in the visible world, no matter how great or how miniscule, whether or not it exists, and whether it is in the future or the past. More than that, the speaker can summon to the listener's mind intangible ideas which cannot be perceived by sense but which the human being reaches through contemplation. And, having summoned all of this to the listener's mind, the speaker can present it to their senses as though the thing itself was there.

The human being could not function in civil society, nor could they have made such astounding progress in their life without being aware of the nature of speech and using it to open the doors of communication with and understanding of one another. Were it not for speech, there would be no difference between the human being and mute beasts—their life would be equally stagnant and monotonous.

The strongest argument for the fact that human beings were guided innately to develop articulate speech is the fact that different nations and peoples developed different languages according to their own spiritual qualities, dispositions of character, and according to the different natural regions in which they lived. God says: '*Among His signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the difference of your languages and colors*' (30:22).

When God says: 'taught him articulate speech,' He does not mean that God created all human languages and then taught them to humankind by revealing them to one of His prophets or by directly inspiring human beings with this knowledge. On the contrary, it is the fact that the human beings finds themselves enmeshed in society that naturally motivates them to develop methods of communication and understanding in the form of the signs and sounds, which we call speech or expression, and without which social and political life would be impossible.

When God acts, it is through creation and origination. However, the association of an utterance with its meaning in spoken language is a matter of social convention rather than of objective reality. Hence, God created the human being and endowed them with an innate nature (*fiṭra*) that predisposed them towards living in a society and developing language through the association of words with meanings such that if the word is presented to a listener, it is as though they have been given the meaning itself. Then, He disposed them to create written symbols whose specific shapes denoted words, such that writing was complementary to the purposes of speech and writing represented speech in the same way as speech represented meaning. It is through endowing humankind with this innate capacity that He can be said to have

given them the gift of speech.

In short, the power of articulate speech is one of the greatest divine blessings and bounties given to humankind; for it preserves the humanity of the human species and guides them towards every good thing.

This is the apparent meaning that comes to mind from these two verses, but commentators on the Qur'an have offered other opinions as well. For example, some say that '*man*' in this verse refers to Adam and '*articulate speech*' refers to the names that God taught to him. Others say that '*man*' refers to the Prophet Muḥammad and '*articulate speech*' refers to the Qur'an, or to his teaching the Qur'an to the believers. Some say that '*articulate speech*' refers to good and evil, which were taught to the human being. Others say that '*articulate speech*' refers to the way of guidance and the way of error. There are other opinions still, all of which, however, are far from the apparent meaning of the verse.

الشَّمْسُ وَالْقَمَرُ بِحُسْبَانٍ ۝٥

(55:5) ***The sun and the moon by calculation***

'Calculation' (*ḥusbān*) is a verbal noun, which has the same meaning as *ḥisāb* ('accounting'). The sentence's subject is 'the sun,' to which 'the moon' is joined by conjunction. Then, 'by calculation' is the predicate of the sentence. The whole sentence 'The sun and the moon by calculation' is itself a predicate for 'The All-beneficent,' above. The meaning of the sentence is that the sun and the moon 'run' by calculation, as God has disposed them to move through the sky.

وَالنَّجْمُ وَالشَّجَرُ يَسْجُدَانِ ۝٦

(55:6) ***and the herb and the tree prostrate***

Scholars have said the word 'herb' (*najm*) refers to plants that sprout up from the ground without any trunk, while the word 'tree' refers to plants with a trunk. This is a good interpretation, which is supported by the fact that the word '*najm*' (which can also mean 'star') is associated with the word 'tree' here. However, the fact that the preceding verse invokes the sun and the moon may suggest that the intended meaning is the celestial body rather than the variety of plant.

When the Qur'an says that the herb and the tree 'prostrate,' this signifies their obedience to the divine command to grow and flourish according

to what has been determined for them, as some have said. However, a more precise understanding is that they strike out beneath the ground with their roots and veins to obtain the minerals and water that they need to sustain themselves. This spreading out through the ground is actually a manifestation of their innate need for a source that will suffice their needs—and, in reality, it is none other than God who nurtures them—and, therefore, this is a form of prostration to God.

Regarding the grammatical construction of the verse '*and the herb and the tree prostrate*,' the particle 'and' joins it to the previous verse, and its structure resemble that verse as well: 'The herb' is the subject of the sentence, 'the tree' is joined to it by conjunction, and the predicate of the sentence is the verb 'prostrate.' Its meaning is: 'And the herb and the tree prostrate to Him.'

In *al-Kashshāf*, we read: 'If one were to ask: "How are these two sentences joined to 'The All-beneficent,' meaning everything between 'The sun...' and '...prostrate'?" I would say: "The obvious semantic connection between the two passages obviates any need for a literal one, as it is evident that the 'calculation' is God's calculation and that they 'prostrate' to God rather than to anyone else!"'

And as for the question of why there are no connectives used between the previous verses: '*He created man, taught him articulate speech, the sun and the moon by calculation*,' al-Zamakhsharī says that this is because God wishes to count out each of these points individually to reprimand those who deny the All-beneficent and His bounties. This is in the same way as one might, for example, reproach one who is ungrateful to their benefactor by saying: 'Zayd helped you out of poverty, restored your dignity, and ensured you had plenty. He did for you what no person would do for another, so how can you show him such ingratitude?'

Having delivered this reproach, God returns to the usual manner of speaking; linking things together with connectives as befits them because of their association and proximity to one another. Now, He says: '*And the herb and the tree prostrate, and He raised the sky....*'

وَالسَّمَاءَ رَفَعَهَا وَوَضَعَ الْمِيزَانَ ۝٧

(55:7) *He raised the sky and set up the balance*

If by 'sky' (*samā'*), God means the upward direction, then He raised it by creating it high up, rather than raising it after it had been created. On the other hand, if He means the celestial bodies that exist above us, then He raised

them in the sense that he appointed them to a place that was high in relation to the earth by separating them after they had previously been joined, as He says elsewhere in the *Have the faithless not regarded that the heavens and the earth were interwoven and We unravelled them* (21:30). In both cases, however, 'raised' is used in the physical sense.

On the other hand, if by 'sky' God meant the place which contains the stations of the heavenly angels and the origin of divine commands and revelation, then 'raised' is used in the spiritual sense or in a sense that combines the physical sense with the spiritual one.

Some have said that 'the balance' (*mīzān*) refers to the balance of justice, meaning 'God has set up justice between you that you might maintain equality by giving each person their due.'

Others have said 'the balance' refers to the tool by which the weights of different things might be measured. However, the first meaning is broader and more comprehensive in its scope.

أَلَّا تَطْغَوْا فِي الْمِيزَانِ ۝٨ وَأَقِيمُوا الْوَزْنَ بِالْقِسْطِ وَلَا تُخْسِرُوا الْمِيزَانَ۝٩

(55:8–9) ***Do not infringe the balance! Maintain the weights with justice, and do not shorten the balance!***

The apparent meaning of 'the balance' is the common weighing scale. Assuming that the balance mentioned in the previous verse is indeed this common weighing scale, then the admonition in this verse '*Do not infringe…!*' explains what it means for Him to have 'set up' the balance. In short: '"We have set up the balance between you" means that you should do justice when measuring weights and not deprive other people of their rights.'

On the other hand, if we were to assume that the balance refers to any method of determining someone's rights or to the ideal of justice in general, then the admonition '*Do not infringe…!*' represents a particular rule derived from a general principle. In which case, this verse means: 'The fact that we have established a measure of rights and the ideal of justice between you means that you should measure weights fairly and not deprive people of their rights when doing so.'

In any case, the apparent construction of the verse is that the Arabic particle *an* in the phrase 'Do not infringe…' (*allā taṭghaw*)[1] is intended to signify an explanation, while *lā taṭghaw* is a prohibition of infringing against the

1 Where *allā* is formed from *an* + *lā*.

balance. Then, *Maintain the weights with justice* is an imperative command that is joined to this prohibition, where *qisṭ* ('justice') means the same as *'adl*. After this, *and do not shorten the balance!* is a second prohibition that explains what God meant by *infringe the balance* and places additional emphasis upon it. 'To shorten the balance' means to interfere with it so that either the buyer or the seller to lose out on their rightful due.

If, on the other hand, we read the verse such that *the balance* is accusative (*nāṣiba*) and *not infringe* is a negation rather than a prohibition, the meaning would become: 'So that you do not infringe the balance.' However, this would require some intellectual gymnastics to explain how an imperative sentence could be linked to a declarative one when we come to *And maintain the weights*....

وَالْأَرْضَ وَضَعَهَا لِلْأَنَامِ ﴿١٠﴾

(55:10) *And the earth, He laid it out for humankind* (anām).

There is a debate about whether the word *anām* here actually denotes 'humankind,' 'humankind and the jinn,' or 'every kind of creature that crawls upon the land.' Note also the deft use of the verb 'laid out' (*waḍa'*) for the earth in this verse, which contrasts nicely with the use of 'raising' (*raf'*) for the sky in the previous one.

فِيهَا فَاكِهَةٌ وَالنَّخْلُ ذَاتُ الْأَكْمَامِ ﴿١١﴾

(55:11) *In it are fruits and date palms with sheaths,*

The Arabic word *fākiha* (translated as 'fruits') denotes all kinds of fruit aside from dates. Meanwhile '*akmām*' (translated as 'sheaths') is the plural of *kumm* (also spelled *kimm*) and refers to the coverings of the date bunches. On the other hand, *kumm* in the sense of a garment is never spelled *kimm*, according to what others have said.

وَالْحَبُّ ذُو الْعَصْفِ وَالرَّيْحَانُ ﴿١٢﴾

(55:12) *Grains with husks, and fragrant herbs.*

This verse is joined to '*fruits*...' in the previous verse, meaning 'And in it are grains with husks, and fragrant herbs.' Grains (*ḥabb*) are the part of the crop that is eaten, such as grain, barley, rice, and so on, while the husks (*'aṣf*) are the part that covers the exterior of those grains. Some have interpreted *'aṣf*

to mean the leaves of crops generally, or the leaves of dried-up crops, while *rayḥān* ('fragrant herbs') refers to pleasant-smelling herbs.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿١٣﴾

(55:13) ***So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?***

Alā' (translated as 'bounties') is the plural of *ilan*, meaning 'blessing.'

This verse is directed to the entirety of the two species of humans and jinn, as can be seen from the fact that subsequent verses address them directly: '*We shall soon make Ourselves unoccupied for you, O you two weighty ones (thaqalān)*!' (55:31); '*O company of jinn and humans...!*' (55:33); and '*There will be unleashed upon you a flash of fire...*' (55:35). Therefore, it cannot be argued that the 'both of you' in this verse is addressed to the male and female of humankind. Neither can it be claimed that it is using the dual to address an individual and that the use of dual signifies emphasis, as it is used in the Arabic sentence *iḍribā 'unuqah* (lit. 'Strike both of you his neck') to signify a repetition of the command (i.e. 'Strike his neck! Strike his neck!').

The reason why the only valid interpretation of the dual in this chapter of the Qur'an is that it is being addressed to humankind and the jinn jointly is because, as we shall discuss below, it counts the tribulations of the Day of Resurrection and the punishment of the wrongdoers as instances of God's blessings. Sending the sinners to be requited with the consequences of their deeds and dispatching the wretched to the fate that befits their wretchedness are part of the proper functioning of the universal order that governs over all the denizens of the cosmos. Therefore, this is a blessing in relation to the whole, even if it represents a curse for a specific part thereof—namely the wrongdoers. This is no different to the way in which customs and laws apply in human societies, where the use of coercive measures against unjust and corrupt persons is necessary for the wellbeing of society as a whole and its survival. It is not merely beneficial for righteous persons, but for everyone, and the same is true for righteous persons being recompensed with beautiful praise and divine rewards.

So, both the punishment and chastisement that hell has for its inmates and the blessings and rewards that paradise contains are a blessing and a boon from God for all human and jinn-kind. This is in the same way that the sun, the moon, the raised sky, the outspread earth, the herb, the tree, and other phenomena are blessings and boons for all the inhabitants of this world.

From these verses, it also becomes apparent that the jinn, as a whole,

benefit from the blessings enumerated in these verses just as humans do. Were this not the case, after all, it would not have befitted God to rebuke them jointly with humankind.

خَلَقَ الْإِنْسَانَ مِنْ صَلْصَالٍ كَالْفَخَّارِ ﴿١٤﴾

(55:14) ***He created man out of dry clay, like the potter's***

'Dry clay' (*ṣalṣāl*) refers to clay that has dried out and hardened so that it makes a clinking sound when trodden upon.

In this verse, when God says 'man' (*insān*), He means the human species, and when He says He created him '*out of dry clay, like the potter's*,' He means that the created form of the human being will eventually become that.

Some have said that by 'man' God means Adam, the first human being.

وَخَلَقَ الْجَانَّ مِنْ مَارِجٍ مِنْ نَارٍ ﴿١٥﴾

(55:15) ***and created the jinn out of a flame of a fire.***

A 'flame' (*mārij*) means a pure spark of fire—although some say it means fire mixed with soot—and the meaning of this with regards to the jinn is the same as that of clay with regards to the human being, so 'jinn' refers to the species of the jinn as a whole, and they are created from fire because that is what their created form will eventually become.

Some have also said that 'jinn' here refers to the first of the jinn.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿١٦﴾

(55:16) ***So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?***

See the explanation of verse 13 above.

رَبُّ الْمَشْرِقَيْنِ وَرَبُّ الْمَغْرِبَيْنِ ﴿١٧﴾

(55:17) ***Lord of the two easts, and Lord of the two wests!***

The meaning of 'two easts' (*mashriqayn*) is the place of sunrise in the winter and its place in the summer, by which the changing of the seasons takes place and the provision of sustenance for God's creatures is arranged.

Some have said the 'two easts' refers to the rising points of the sun and the moon, while the 'two wests' are their respective setting points.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿١٨﴾

(55:18) ***So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?***

See the explanation of verse 13 above.

مَرَجَ الْبَحْرَيْنِ يَلْتَقِيَانِ ﴿١٩﴾ بَيْنَهُمَا بَرْزَخٌ لَا يَبْغِيَانِ ﴿٢٠﴾

(55:19–20) ***He merged the two seas, meeting each other. There is a barrier between them which they do not overstep.***

Maraja (translated as 'He merged') can either mean that He mixed the seas, or that He sent them. However, the first meaning is closer to the apparent meaning of the verse. And it appears that 'the two seas' refers to fresh water and to salt water, as in the verse: *Not alike are the two seas: this one sweet and agreeable, pleasant to drink, and that one briny and bitter, and from each you eat fresh meat and obtain ornaments which you wear* (35:12).

The most acceptable reading that has been proposed with regards to 'the two seas' is that they do not refer to any two specific seas, but to two types of sea: Salt water, which covers approximately three-quarters of the earth's surface—this includes oceans and other seas—and fresh water, which is stored in underground reservoirs and comes to the surface via springs before flowing out to sea in great rivers. These two kinds of water are continuously meeting one another, but between them is a barrier, both in the physical form of underground reservoirs and in the non-physical form that prevents saltwater from mixing directly with fresh water and thereby contaminating it and ending life, while also preventing fresh water from flooding the oceans and making them fresh water also and thereby removing the benefits of their saltiness, such as purifying the air and so on.

The seas continue to replenish freshwater sources in the form of rainwater, which is carried from the seas in the form of clouds inland before raining down and being stored in the reservoirs of the earth. At the same time, fresh water continues to replenish the seas through rivers flowing out into them.

Therefore, the meaning of these two verses—and God knows best—is that God has merged the two seas of salt water and fresh water in that they are in constant contact while between them there exists a barrier which neither can overstep, such that one could overwhelm the other, remove its saltiness or freshness, and thereby destroy the natural order that sustains life in this world.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٢١﴾

(55:21) ***So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?***

See the explanation of verse 13 above.

يَخْرُجُ مِنْهُمَا اللُّؤْلُؤُ وَالْمَرْجَانُ ﴿٢٢﴾

(55:22) ***From them emerge the pearl and the coral.***

Meaning from the two seas of fresh and salty water both, and these are one of the many benefits that their combined existence provides to human beings. See also our commentary on the verse: *Not alike are the two seas...* (35:12).

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٢٣﴾

(55:23) ***So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?***

See the explanation of verse 13 above.

وَلَهُ الْجَوَارِ الْمُنْشَآتُ فِي الْبَحْرِ كَالْأَعْلَامِ ﴿٢٤﴾

(55:24) ***His are the ships sailing on the sea like landmarks.***

'Ships' is a translation of *jawārī* (the plural of *jāriya*); 'sailing' is a translation of *munsha'āt*, the passive participle of *inshā'*, which means to bring forth and nurture something; and 'landmarks' are the translation of *a'lām*, meaning 'mountains.'

This verse asserts God's ownership of ships, even though these are man-made objects, because the material causes of their existence—wood, metal, and other components—and the human who assembles them—along with their senses, their mind, and their will—are all ultimately created by God and, therefore, belong to Him. Hence, whatever these creations produce belongs to God as well.

God has blessed the human being by inspiring them with the knowledge of how to manufacture things, the benefits that flow from them, and how to make the most of these benefits.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٢٥﴾

(55:25) ***So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?***

See the explanation of verse 13 above.

كُلُّ مَنْ عَلَيْهَا فَانٍ ﴿٢٦﴾ وَيَبْقَىٰ وَجْهُ رَبِّكَ ذُو الْجَلَالِ وَالْإِكْرَامِ ﴿٢٧﴾

(55:26–27) ***Everyone on it is ephemeral, yet lasting is the Face of your Lord, majestic and munificent.***

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'On it' means 'on the earth.' In other words, every sentient and thinking being upon the earth will perish. This verse consigns all of humankind and the jinn to extinction and oblivion.

This verse uses the expression 'everyone' (*kullu man*), which denotes every thinking creature, rather than 'everything' (*kullu mā*) because the purpose of this chapter of the Qur'an is to enumerate the boons and blessings that God has provided to humankind and the jinn in their this-worldly and next-worldly existences.

The apparent meaning of the word *fānin* (translated as 'ephemeral') is that it refers to the future, as can also be gleaned from its context. This suggests that *Everyone on it is ephemeral* alludes to the fact this worldly creation will come to an end with the extinction of those who dwell within it, namely the jinn and humankind. A new creation will then be inaugurated for them, and both the extinction of this worldly creation and the dawning of the new creation of recompense upon them are counted amongst God's boons and blessings. This is because the life of this world is intended as a preliminary step towards the goal of the hereafter; and moving from a preliminary step to its ultimate goal is the highest form of blessing conceivable.

This is the answer to someone who asks: 'How can the passing away of everything this world be considered a blessing?' It is because the reality of this passing away is returning to God by leaving this world behind, as numerous verses of the Qur'an explain. 'Ephemeral' is not used here in the sense of undergoing total annihilation.

As for when God says: *yet lasting is the face of your Lord*, the face (*wajh*) of a thing is the aspect of itself with which it turns towards another and directs its attention to them. In the case of God Almighty, His Face refers to His noble attributes, which serve as intermediaries between Himself and His creation, through which He sends down the blessings of His creation and guidance upon them. Examples of these attributes include His knowledge, power, hearing, seeing, mercy, forgiveness, and provision. See our commentary on Sūrah al-Aʿrāf for the full discussion of how the divine names and divine attributes act as intermediaries between God and His creation.

As for His saying: *majestic and munificent*, the term 'majesty' (*jalāl*) is suggestive of spiritual elevation and superiority over others. This befits divine attributes that convey a sense of imperiousness and authority, such as exaltation, transcendence, greatness, grandeur, pride, encompassing, might, and overpowering.

By contrast, 'munificence' (*ikrām*) suggests magnificence and splendor that attract others and astound them. This befits divine attributes such as knowledge, power, life, mercy, generosity, beauty, splendor, and the like. These are commonly called 'the attributes of beauty' (*ṣifāt al-jamāl*), while the former category of attributes are often known as 'the attributes of majesty' (*ṣifāt al-jalāl*). The divine names are also categorized into beautiful and majestic names according to which of these attributes they reflect.

Hence, 'majestic and munificent' (*dhū al-jalāl wa al-ikrām*) is one of the divine names that unites in its meaning both the names of beauty and the names of majesty. And the real entity to which this name refers is none other than the divine essence (*dhāt*), as indicated by the final verse of this chapter, *Blessed is the name of your Lord, the Lord of majesty and honour!*

However, the present verse—*yet lasting is the face of your Lord, majestic and munificent*—focuses on God's face. This is for one of two reasons: First, because the phrase *majestic and munificent* is not intended to be read as an adjective for *face* but is rather intended as praise for *your Lord*. In other words, it is to be read as *yet lasting is the face of your Lord*, and He is *majestic and munificent*. Second, because what is meant by 'face' here—as we have already said—is God's attribute of munificence and the divine name associated with it, and to apply one divine name to another divine name is no different from applying that divine name to the divine essence itself.

If 'face' is understood to mean the aspect of a thing with which it turns itself toward another—meaning a divine name—then it is self-evident that the subsistence in objective reality of a name is subsidiary to the subsistence in objective reality of the thing it names. Based on this principle, the verse would mean: 'But lasting is your Lord with His majesty and munificence, and He will not be affected by their passing in the least, nor will He be changed by it.'

On the other hand, if 'face' is understood to mean the means by which something directs its attention towards another, this would refer to everything that is attributed to Him and whatever He turns His attention towards, such as His prophets, His representatives, His religion, His reward, proximity to Him, and other things like this. In which case, the verse would mean: 'Whatever is with God will survive the extinction of the inhabitants of this world, namely

that which is in His proximity, such as the various kinds of divine recompense, reward, and nearness to Him.' God says: *That which is with you will be spent but what is with God shall last* (16:96).

Our commentary on the verse *Everything is to perish except His Face.* (28:88) contains other useful points in this regard.

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فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٢٨﴾

(55:28) ***So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?***

See the explanation of verse 13 above.

يَسْأَلُهُ مَنْ فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۚ كُلَّ يَوْمٍ هُوَ فِي شَأْنٍ ﴿٢٩﴾

(55:29) ***Everyone in the heavens and the earth asks Him. Every day He is engaged in some work.***

Their asking him is the asking of their innate neediness, for they are in need of Him from every aspect of their being; their existence is utterly contingent upon Him, and they cling to the skirt of the richness of His being. God says: *You are the ones who stand in need of God, and God He is the All-sufficient* (35:15), and the verb 'ask' appears in the same sense in the verse *and He gave you all that you had asked Him* (14:34).

As for His saying: *Every day He is engaged in some work*, the word 'some work' (*sha'nin*) is kept indefinite to emphasise the variety and diversity of this work. Thus, it means that at every moment, God is engaged in some work that is different to what came before it and what will come after it. He does not perform any action He takes more than once, nor does any work He undertakes resemble any other work He has undertaken from any angle. He only acts without prior example, and the term for this is *ibdā'* (origination). That is why God describes Himself as: *The originator of the heavens and the earth* (2:117).

The verse says 'every day' to show that God's agency and His direction of things is all-encompassing; He is present at every time, but He is never contained by time; He is present in every place, but He is never contained by place; He is with everything, but He does not approach anything.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *al-Kāfī*, Muḥammad ibn al-Munkadir narrates from Jābir ibn 'Abd Allāh: 'When God's Messenger recited *al-Raḥmān* to people, they fell silent and did not say anything. So, God's Messenger told

them: "The jinn gave a better response than you when I recited to them '*So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?*'" (55:13) They said: "No, we will not deny any of our Lord's bounties!"'

Author's comments: A tradition with a similar meaning is narrated in *al-Durr al-manthūr* from the compilers of a number of *ḥadīth* collections, and it is declared an authentic narration from Ibn ʿUmar, from the Prophet.

(2) In *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, via a chain of narrators to (Imām) al-Riḍā: 'One of the things about which the Syrian man asked ʿAlī was the name of the first jinn. He said: "Shu'mān, and he was the one created '*out of a flame of a fire*' (55:15)."'

(3) In *al-Iḥtijāj* a tradition is narrated from (Imām) ʿAlī, which he says: 'As for the verse "*Lord of the two easts, and Lord of the two wests*," (55:17) the sun rises in winter in one place and in summer in another. Do you not know this from the sun's getting nearer and farther away?'

Author's comments: A tradition with the same meaning is narrated in *Tafsīr al-Qummī* with an incomplete chain of narrators.

(4) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, Ibn Mardawayh narrates from Ibn ʿAbbās: Regarding the verse: '*He merged the two seas, meeting each other*,' (55:19) he said: "Alī and Fāṭima.' Regarding: '*There is a barrier between them which they do not overstep*,' (55:20) he said: 'The Prophet.' Regarding: '*From them emerge the pearl and the coral*,' (55:22) he said: 'al-Ḥasan and al-Ḥusayn.'

Author's comments: Ibn Mardawayh also narrates something similar from Anas b. Mālik. This is also narrated in *Majmaʿ al-bayān* from Salmān al-Fārsī, Saʿīd b. Jubayr, and Sufiyān al-Thawrī. And this is an esoteric interpretation of the verse.

(5) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, concerning the verse: '*Everyone on it is ephemeral,*' (55:26) he says: 'Whoever is on the face of the earth,' and concerning: '*yet lasting is the face of your Lord*,' (55:27) he says: 'The religion of your Lord. And (Imām) ʿAlī ibn al-Ḥusayn said: "We are the face through which God dispenses blessings to His creatures."'

(6) In the *Manāqib* of Ibn Shahrāshūb, concerning the verse: '*yet lasting is the face of your Lord*,' it is narrated from (Imām) al-Ṣādiq: 'We are the face of God.'

Author's comments: There are narrations in addition to the two above that have the same meaning, and we have already explained how the term 'face' (*wajh*) can refer to either the religion (*dīn*) or the Imām.

(7) In *al-Kāfī*, there is a sermon of ʿAlī's which reads: 'Praise belongs to God who never dies and whose wonders never cease, for He is in every day engaged in some work of originating some amazing thing that did not previously exist.'

(8) And in *Tafsīr al-Qummī* concerning the same verse (55:29), we read: 'He gives life and causes death, increases and decreases.'

(9) In *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, it is narrated from Abī Dardā', from the Prophet concerning the verse '*Every day He is engaged in some work*' (55:29): 'Part of His work is to forgive sins and relieve sorrows, and to lift up some nations and humble others.'

Author's comments: This is also narrated from him in *al-Durr al-manthūr*, and a narration with the same meaning is narrated from Ibn ʿUmar from the Prophet, but it reads instead: '...to forgive sins and to alleviate burdens.'

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Verses 30–78

This is the second part of the chapter, whose verses describe the second creation (*nash'a*) of the jinn and humankind—which is the creation in which they return to God and are recompensed for their deeds—and enumerate God's bounties to them therein. This is just as the first part of the chapter described the original creation and enumerated God's bounties to them therein.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٣٠﴾

(55:30) ***So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?***

See the explanation of verse 13.

سَنَفْرُغُ لَكُمْ أَيُّهَ الثَّقَلَانِ ﴿٣١﴾

(55:31) ***We shall soon make Ourselves unoccupied for you, O you notable two!***

'To make someone unoccupied for a matter' (*farāgh*) means that a person was occupied with other matters previously, but they put them to one side to devote their full attention to this new matter because of its importance.

Therefore, *We shall soon make Ourselves unoccupied for you*, means that We shall soon wrap up the matter of the original creation and devote Our attention to you. The following verses make clear that this refers to their resurrection, their judgement, and the recompense for their deeds, whether good or evil. Therefore, '*make Ourselves unoccupied for you*' alludes to the transformation of the world for a new creation.

However, God making Himself 'unoccupied' for the jinn and humankind does not contradict the principle that God is not distracted from one thing by another (*lā yashghaluhu sha'nun 'an sha'nin*). This is because the phrase '*make Ourselves unoccupied*' is with regard to the changing of one creation for another, whereas the principle that God is not distracted from one thing by another is with regard to God's omnipotence and omnipresence. This is akin to the fact that the description of God as '*every day*' being '*engaged in some work*' (55:29) is with regard to the variety of work and, as such, does not contradict the principle that God is not distracted from one thing by another.

'You notable two' (*al-thaqalān*) refers to the jinn and humankind, while the instances of the second-person plural pronoun 'you' in 'for you' (*lakum*)—in this verse—and the verb 'you can' (*istaṭa'tum*)—in the following verse—and in other places of this chapter refer to *thaqalān* even though *thaqalān* is grammatically dual, because while the jinn and humankind are two groups, they contain a multitude of individuals.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٣٢﴾

(55:32) ***So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?***

See the explanation of verse 13.

يَا مَعْشَرَ الْجِنِّ وَالْإِنْسِ إِنِ اسْتَطَعْتُمْ أَنْ تَنْفُذُوا مِنْ أَقْطَارِ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ فَانْفُذُوا ۚ لَا تَنْفُذُونَ إِلَّا بِسُلْطَانٍ ﴿٣٣﴾

(55:33) ***O company of jinn and humans! If you can pass through the confines of the heavens and the earth, then do pass through. But you will not pass through except by an authority.***

Based on the context of this verse, this address appears to be something that will be spoken to the jinn and humankind on the Day of Resurrection. Furthermore, this address is intended as a challenge, in order to reveal their incapacity to do what it says.

The meaning of 'can' (*istiṭā'a*) here is power (*qudra*), while '*pass through the confines...*' means to escape through them, and 'confines' (*aqṭār*) is the plural of *quṭr*, which literally means a region or a quarter.

The meaning of the verse as a whole reads: 'O company of jinn and humans—and the jinn are mentioned first because they are able to move faster than humans—if you are able to flee by passing through the regions of the heavens and the earth and thereby escape God's dominion and avoid His punishment, then flee and do so!'

But you will not pass through except by an authority means you will not be able to pass through without some authority to do so, and you do not have any. 'Authority' (*sulṭān*) means existential power (*qudra wujūdiyya*), but it can also mean a conclusive argument or any kind of proof, and it may also mean sovereignty.

Some say that the meaning of *pass through* in this verse refers to penetrating the depths of the heavens and the earth with one's knowledge. However,

it is clear that this meaning is incompatible with the context.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٣٤﴾

(55:34) ***So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?***

See the explanation of verse 13.

يُرْسَلُ عَلَيْكُمَا شُوَاظٌ مِنْ نَارٍ وَنُحَاسٌ فَلَا تَنْتَصِرَانِ ﴿٣٥﴾

(55:35) ***There will be unleashed upon you a flash of fire and a smoke; then you will not be able to help one another.***

According to Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, 'flash' (*shuwāẓ*) refers to a flame without smoke. *Majmaʿ al-Bayān* offers a similar meaning to this; that it is a green flame separated from fire. Meanwhile, the word used for 'smoke' in this verse is *nuḥās*. Al-Rāghib says: 'It is a flame without smoke,' and the meaning is clear.

When God says: *you will not be able to help one another*, He means you will not be able to come to one another's aid against the tribulation in which you find yourselves nor help one another escape. This is because the system of cause and effect in the hereafter operates differently from in this world, and there is no protection from God on that day.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٣٦﴾

(55:36) ***So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?***

See the explanation of verse 13.

فَإِذَا انْشَقَّتِ السَّمَاءُ فَكَانَتْ وَرْدَةً كَالدِّهَانِ ﴿٣٧﴾

(55:37) ***When the sky is split open, and turns crimson like tanned leather.***

The meaning of this verse is clear.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٣٨﴾

(55:38) ***So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?***

See the explanation of verse 13.

فَيَوْمَئِذٍ لَا يُسْأَلُ عَنْ ذَنْبِهِ إِنْسٌ وَلَا جَانٌّ ﴿٣٩﴾

(55:39) ***On that day neither humans will be questioned about their sins nor jinn.***

This verse and all the verses that follow it until the end of the chapter describe the process of judgement and recompense for one's deeds on the Day of Resurrection, and they describe the condition of the transgressors, those who feared the station of their Lord, and the ultimate outcomes of both groups.

Then the verse describes the swiftness of God's judgement, as He says elsewhere: *and God is swift at reckoning* (24:39).

The meaning of '*on that day*' is the Day of Resurrection, while the word questioning here is used to denote the conventional sense of asking questions. However, the fact that this verse says they will not be questioned does not contradict what has been said elsewhere, namely: *stop them! For they must be questioned* (37:24) and: *by your Lord, We will question them all* (15:92). This is because the Day of Resurrection has a variety of stages; in some of them, people will be questioned; in others, some of their mouths will be sealed and their limbs will be made to speak instead; while in others still, some will be known by their mark.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٤٠﴾

(55:40) ***So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?***

See the explanation of verse 13.

يُعْرَفُ الْمُجْرِمُونَ بِسِيمَاهُمْ فَيُؤْخَذُ بِالنَّوَاصِي وَالْأَقْدَامِ ﴿٤١﴾

(55:41) ***The guilty will be recognized by their mark, so they will be seized by the forelocks and the feet.***

Based on the context, this verse appears to be the answer to an implicit question, namely: 'If they are not asked about their sins, then what will be done with them?' The verse answers by saying that these transgressors will be known by their mark. This is why this verse is not joined to the previous one with a connective such as 'and' but instead appears to start afresh. The meaning of '*their mark*' is a sign that is visible upon their faces.

As for when God says: *they will be seized by the forelocks and the feet*, this follows on from what we have just said. 'Forelocks' (*nawāṣī*, sing. *nāsiya*) refers to the hair at the front of the head, while *feet* is a translation of *aqdām* (sing.

qadam). The phrase '*by the forelocks*' occupies the grammatical position of the doer of the passive verb '*seized*.'

The meaning of this verse reads: 'None will be asked about their sin. The guilty will be recognized by the visible marks upon their faces. Then, the guilty will be seized by their forelocks and feet and thrown into hellfire.'

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فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٤٢﴾

(55:42) ***So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?***

See the explanation of verse 13.

هَٰذِهِ جَهَنَّمُ الَّتِي يُكَذِّبُ بِهَا الْمُجْرِمُونَ ﴿٤٣﴾ يَطُوفُونَ بَيْنَهَا وَبَيْنَ حَمِيمٍ آنٍ ﴿٤٤﴾

(55:43–44) ***This is the hell which the guilty would deny! They shall circuit between it and boiling hot water.***

These verses relate what will be said on the Day of Resurrection. In other words, it means: 'On that day, they will be told: "This is the hell which the guilty would deny!"'

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Al-Ṭabrisī says: 'It might be the case that when God foretells that the guilty will be seized by their forelocks and feet, He addressed thee words to the Prophet, meaning: '*This is the hell which the guilty* of your people *would deny*, but they will soon enter it, so do not concern yourself with their fate.'

Boiling hot water is the translation of *ḥamīm ānin*, where *ḥamīm* denotes hot water and *ānin* means extreme hotness.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٤٥﴾

(55:45) ***So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?***

See the explanation of verse 13.

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وَلِمَنْ خَافَ مَقَامَ رَبِّهِ جَنَّتَانِ ﴿٤٦﴾

(55:46) ***For him who fears his Lord's standing will be two gardens.***

Now the Qur'an turns to the description of the felicitous and their condition in the hereafter, beginning with the fact that they 'fear their Lord's standing.' Standing is a translation of *maqām*, which is an infinitive verb attached

to its doer. Here, this signifies God standing over them with their deeds, which refers to His all-encompassing knowledge of what they did, His preserving of it, and His recompensing them according to it—as He says elsewhere, it is *He who stands over every soul with what it earns* (13:33).

It is also possible that *maqām* is a noun of place and that the possessive construct used here signifies that this standing belongs to God. In this case, it denotes God's standing and position in relation to His servants; that God is their Lord who looks after their affairs, and as part of looking after their affairs, He sent divine messengers who used their tongues to summon them to faith and good deeds. Another part of looking after their affairs is that He decreed that He would recompense them for whatever good or evil they did in this life and told them that His knowledge encompasses their deeds fully, that He is all-hearing of what they say, and that He is all-seeing of what they do, and that He is most-subtle, well-aware.

Fear (*khawf*) of God might mean fearing His punishment for disbelieving in Him or for disobeying Him, and the logical corollary of this would be that the worship of those who worship Him was intended to protect themselves from His punishment rather than being purely for His sake. This worship is that of a slave serving their master—they obey out of fear of chastisement. Equally, the goal of those who worship God out of desire for His reward is to gratify themselves rather than purely seeking His countenance. This worship is that of a merchant—as we find narrated in tradition, part of which we have already discussed previously.

However, the fear mentioned in this verse appears to be distinct from the kind of fear we have just mentioned, as the fear of punishment is not the same as the fear of God standing over His servant with what they have done or fearing His position in relation to His servant, as this is a special kind of feeling that belongs to those who harbour only humility and submissiveness before God's greatness and tremendousness, and who display their lowliness and abasement before His absolute might and majesty.

Worshipping God while fearing Him in this sense means humbling oneself before Him because God is the Lord of majesty and honour, not because you are afraid of His punishment or desirous of His reward, but because you are acting out of sincere and heartfelt devotion, seeking only His countenance. This is the meaning of the fear which God attributes to His noble angels, for angels do not sin and are therefore already safe from being punished for disobeying Him or contravening His ordinances: *They fear their Lord above them* (16:50).

From the above, it becomes clear that those who fear the standing of their Lord in this verse are the truly devoted (*ahl al-ikhlāṣ*) who submit themselves before His grandeur and worship Him for no other reason than the fact that He is God, not because they are afraid of His punishment or because they desire His reward. It is not unlikely that this group of people are the same that He refers to as 'the Foremost Ones' (*sābiqūn*) in the verses: '*you will be three groups... and the Foremost Ones are the Foremost Ones: they are the ones brought near*' (56:7–11).

Why does God say 'two gardens' (*jannatān*)? Some have said it is because one of the gardens is a person's home and the place in which they are visited by their loved ones, while the other is the home of their spouse and their servants. Others have said that these are the two gardens of a person's palace: one on its inside and the other on its outside. Some have said that these two gardens are two homes between which an inhabitant of paradise moves back and forth and, in doing so, gains the full enjoyment of paradise. Still others have said that one of these gardens is a garden given in recompense for their beliefs and the other is a garden given in recompense for their good deeds. Some have said that one of the gardens is given for their doing of good deeds and the other is given for their avoidance of sins. Others have said that one of the gardens is corporeal and the other is spiritual. However, as should be obvious, none of these opinions have any evidence to support them.

It has also been suggested that one of these gardens is given as a reward (*thawāb*) and the other as a grace (*faḍl*), and this could be deduced from the verse: *There they will have whatever they wish, and with Us there is yet more* (50:35), as we have already discussed in our commentary on it.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٤٧﴾

(55:47) ***So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?***

See the explanation of verse 13.

ذَوَاتَا أَفْنَانٍ ﴿٤٨﴾

(55:48) ***Both abounding in branches***

Branches is a translation of *afnān*, which can be read as either the plural of *fann* or the plural of *fanan*. In the first instance, *fann* signifies 'species' or 'variety,' in which case the verse means that these gardens abound in different varieties of fruit and the like thereof. In the latter instance, *fanan* refers to 'a

supple and pliant branch,' which would signify that these gardens are full of trees with supple branches.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٤٩﴾

(55:49) ***So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?***

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See the explanation of verse 13.

فِيهِمَا عَيْنَانِ تَجْرِيَانِ ﴿٥٠﴾

(55:50) ***In both of them will be two flowing springs'***

The fact that the phrase 'two flowing springs' is left indefinite and ambiguous serves to magnify the importance of these springs.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٥١﴾

(55:51) ***So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?***

See the explanation of verse 13.

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فِيهِمَا مِنْ كُلِّ فَاكِهَةٍ زَوْجَانِ ﴿٥٢﴾

(55:52) ***In both of them will be two kinds of every fruit***

This means two types. Some have suggested this means one type that was known to people while they were alive in this world and a type they have never seen before during their worldly lives. Other interpretations have been offered as well. However, none of these have any evidence to support them.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٥٣﴾

(55:53) ***So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?***

See the explanation of verse 13.

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مُتَّكِئِينَ عَلَىٰ فُرُشٍ بَطَائِنُهَا مِنْ إِسْتَبْرَقٍ ۚ وَجَنَى الْجَنَّتَيْنِ دَانٍ ﴿٥٤﴾

(55:54) ***Reclining on beds lined with green brocade. And the fruit of the two gardens will be near at hand.***

Beds is a translation of *furush* (sing. *firāsh*); *lined* is a translation of

baṭā'in (sing. *baṭāna*), literally signifying the interior or inside of something as opposed to its exterior (*zahāra*, pl. *zahā'ir*); *brocade* is a translation of *istabraq*, meaning thick silk. According to *Majma' al-bayān*, this verse mentions the interior but not the exterior of these beds because the fact that they have an interior indicates that they must also have an exterior, and if the interior is made with brocade, then the exterior must be made of something even more luxurious.

Fruit is a translation of *janā*, signifying fruit that has been harvested. *Near at hand* is a translation of *dānin*, which is the active participle of *danuww*, meaning close at hand. In other words, the fruit harvested from the two gardens will be close by.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٥٥﴾

(55:55) ***So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?***

See the explanation of verse 13.

فِيهِنَّ قَاصِرَاتُ الطَّرْفِ لَمْ يَطْمِثْهُنَّ إِنْسٌ قَبْلَهُمْ وَلَا جَانٌّ ﴿٥٦﴾

(55:56) ***In them are maidens of restrained glances, whom no human has touched before, nor jinn.***

The pronoun *hinna* (feminine plural) is used in the phrase '*in them*' (*fī hinna*) to refer to these beds. However, it could also refer to the gardens of paradise, as each and every one of God's friends has two of them. *Ṭarf* literally means 'eyelid' and their being '*of restrained glances*' is that they are satisfied with their spouses and do not desire anyone else.

Whom no human has touched before, nor jinn means that they have never been married or had intercourse with anyone before their spouses in paradise.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٥٧﴾

(55:57) ***So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?***

See the explanation of verse 13.

كَأَنَّهُنَّ الْيَاقُوتُ وَالْمَرْجَانُ ﴿٥٨﴾

(55:58) ***As though they were rubies and corals***

Meaning in their purity of their color, splendor, and brightness.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٥٩﴾

(55:59) ***So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?***

See the explanation of verse 13.

هَلْ جَزَاءُ الْإِحْسَانِ إِلَّا الْإِحْسَانُ ﴿٦٠﴾

(55:60) ***Is the requital of goodness anything but goodness?***

This is a rhetorical question that is intended to illustrate why God has given each of the inhabitants of paradise two gardens filled with all manner of blessings and bounties. It shows that God grants them this goodness as a recompense for the goodness they did because they feared the standing of their Lord.

This verse shows that whatever they have been given of paradise and its blessings is a recompense for their deeds. As for what is gleaned from other verses, namely that God grants them blessings in excess (*faḍl*) of their just desserts, this is not addressed in the present verse unless we were to say that goodness (*iḥsān*) is only complete if it exceeds the goodness done by the doer of good. In this case, *goodness* in the phrase *but goodness* automatically includes this excess.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٦١﴾

(55:61) ***So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?***

See the explanation of verse 13.

وَمِنْ دُونِهِمَا جَنَّتَانِ ﴿٦٢﴾

(55:62) ***Beneath these two, there will be two other gardens.***

The phrase *these two* refers to the two gardens already described in the above verses of this chapter. 'Beneath these two' (*min dūnihimā*) means at a lower level to them and at a lesser degree of divine grace and nobility, even if they are similar to the two aforementioned gardens in terms of their blessings and bounties. As we have already mentioned, the first pair of gardens were for the people of devotion and sincerity to God who feared the standing of their Lord. Therefore, the two gardens referenced in this verse are for believers of a lower rank, for example those who worshipped God out of fear of hell or out

of desire for paradise, and these are known as the Companions of the Right (*aṣḥāb al-yamīn*).

It is said that 'beneath these two' (*min dūnihimā*) means 'close to them,' in which case the context suggests that these two gardens also belong to the owners of the two gardens described above. In fact, some have claimed that these two gardens are actually superior to the ones just mentioned and that the qualities assigned to them are more praiseworthy.

If you ponder on what we presented above regarding the meaning of *fear the station of his Lord* and the verses showing the people of paradise are of two varieties— Those Brought Near (*al-muqarrabūn*), who are the people of devotion and sincerity, and the Companions of the Right (*aṣḥāb al-yamīn*)—you will see the strength of our interpretation of these verses.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٦٣﴾

(55:63) ***So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?***

See the explanation of verse 13.

مُدْهَامَّتَانِ ﴿٦٤﴾

(55:64) ***Dark green***

This denotes a deep green color, approaching black, which reflects the verdancy of the trees.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٦٥﴾

(55:65) ***So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?***

See the explanation of verse 13.

فِيهِمَا عَيْنَانِ نَضَّاخَتَانِ ﴿٦٦﴾

(55:66) ***In both of them will be two gushing springs***

Meaning, they rush forth forcefully from their source.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٦٧﴾

(55:67) ***So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?***

See the explanation of verse 13.

فِيهِمَا فَاكِهَةٌ وَنَخْلٌ وَرُمَّانٌ ﴿٦٨﴾

(55:68) ***'In both of them will be fruits, date palms and pomegranates.'***

The words 'fruits' and 'pomegranates' mean 'fruit trees' and 'pomegranate trees,' as indicating by the use of the word *nakhl* ('date palm,' rather than 'date').

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٦٩﴾

(55:69) ***So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?***

See the explanation of verse 13.

فِيهِنَّ خَيْرَاتٌ حِسَانٌ ﴿٧٠﴾

(55:70) ***In them are maidens good and lovely***

The use of the plural pronoun *hinna* (instead of the dual, *humā*) *in them* (fī hinna) refers to the gardens insofar as these two gardens are one pair among many. Some have said the plural reflects the fact that this refers to all four gardens, while others have said that it refers to the fruit and pomegranate trees and date palms.

The word *khayr* (good) is usually used for abstract ideas, while *ḥasan* ('lovely') tends to be used for tangible forms. Therefore, referring to these maidens as *khayrāt ḥisān* ('good and lovely') means that they are beautiful in their manners and beautiful in their appearance.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٧١﴾

(55:71) ***So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?***

See the explanation of verse 13.

حُورٌ مَقْصُورَاتٌ فِي الْخِيَامِ ﴿٧٢﴾

(55:72) ***Houris secluded in pavilions***

Khiyām (pavilions) is the plural of *khayma* (tent) and denotes an encampment. The fact that the houris are described as 'secluded' (*maqṣūrāt*) indicates that they are chaste and not licentious; none have access to them save their

partners.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٧٣﴾

(55:73) ***So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?***

See the explanation of verse 13.

لَمْ يَطْمِثْهُنَّ إِنْسٌ قَبْلَهُمْ وَلَا جَانٌّ ﴿٧٤﴾

(55:74) ***Whom no human has touched before, nor jinn***

The meaning of this has already been discussed, above.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٧٥﴾

(55:75) ***So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?***

See the explanation of verse 13.

مُتَّكِئِينَ عَلَىٰ رَفْرَفٍ خُضْرٍ وَعَبْقَرِيٍّ حِسَانٍ ﴿٧٦﴾

(55:76) ***Reclining on green cushions and lovely carpets***

In the dictionary *al-Ṣiḥāḥ*, we read: '*Rafraf* (translated as 'cushions') is a green fabric used for seating.' It is also said that *rafraf* refers to pillows, and there are other possible meanings offered besides these. *Khuḍr* (green) is the plural of *akhḍar* and is an adjective for *rafraf*. As for *'abqarī* (translated as 'carpets'), it is said to mean a carpet, a pile rug, woven fabric, or brocade.

فَبِأَيِّ آلَاءِ رَبِّكُمَا تُكَذِّبَانِ ﴿٧٧﴾

(55:77) ***So which of your Lord's bounties will you both deny?***

See the explanation of verse 13.

تَبَارَكَ اسْمُ رَبِّكَ ذِي الْجَلَالِ وَالْإِكْرَامِ ﴿٧٨﴾

(55:78) ***Blessed is the name of your Lord, the Lord of majesty and honour!***

This verse praises God for the blessings and bounties with which He has filled the two creations of this world and the hereafter, and the boons sent that

come down from His divine presence through His all-encompassing mercy. From the above, it is clear that the 'name' (*ism*) meant here is All-beneficent (*al-Raḥmān*), with which this chapter begins. 'Blessed' (*tabāruk*) means to abound in good things and to overflow with blessings.

Therefore, *Blessed is the Name of your Lord* means 'Blessed is God, who is named the All-beneficent, for His abundant blessings.'

And *the Lord of majesty and honour* refers to the fact He is also known by the Beautiful Names, which stem from His divine attributes that describe His beauty and His majesty. This is because the attributes of an agent are visible in their actions and cause those actions. In this way, these attributes are bound to the agent through the act. Hence, God created the creation and instituted the cosmic order because He is the originator (*badīʿ*), the creator (*khāliq*), and the initiator (*mubdiʾ*); and He did all of this proficiently because He is all-knowing (*ʿalīm*) and most-wise (*ḥakīm*). He requites the obedient with good things because He is loving (*wadūd*), appreciative (*shakūr*), forgiving (*ghafūr*), and merciful (*raḥīm*), while he punishes the sinners because He is the avenger (*muntaqim*) and severe in punishment (*shadīd al-ʿiqāb*).

Therefore, the Lord—who is praised for His all-encompassing mercy—is described as *the Lord of majesty and honour* in order to highlight His Beautiful Names (*asmāʾ al-ḥusnāʾ*) and lofty attributes (*ṣifāt al-ʿulyāʾ*) and the fact that these play a role in the sending down of blessings and good things from Him, and that the gifts and bounties He bestows emanate from these beautiful names and lofty attributes.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, we read a report which says: 'He will surround the creation with the angels and with a tongue of flame, then they will be told: "*O company of jinn and humans... there will be unleashed upon you a flash of fire*"' (55:33).

Author's comments: A tradition with the same meaning has also been narrated from Masʿada b. Sadaqa, from Kulayb, from Abī ʿAbd Allāh (Imām al-Ṣādiq).

(2) In *al-Kāfī*, al-Kulaynī narrates via a chain of narrators leading to Dāwūd al-Raqqī, from Abū ʿAbd Allāh (Imām al-Ṣādiq), concerning the verse: '*For him who fears his Lord's standing will be two gardens*' (55:46). He says: 'Whoever knows that God sees them, hears what they say, and knows whatever they do, whether good or evil, and that knowledge prevents them from doing immoral deeds, that

is someone who fears their Lord's standing and forbids themselves from following desire.'

(3) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, Ibn Abī Shayba, Aḥmad, Ibn Manīʿ, and al-Ḥakīm in *Nawādir al-uṣūl*, and al-Nasāʾī, al-Bazzār, Abū Yaʿlā, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Ibn al-Mundhir, al-Ṭabarānī, and Ibn Mardawayh all narrate the following account from Ibn Abī Dardāʾ: The Prophet recited the verse: "*For him who fears his Lord's standing will be two gardens,*" and I asked: "Even if they fornicate or steal, O Messenger of God?" The Prophet recited again: "*For him who fears his Lord's standing will be two gardens*," I asked again: "Even if they fornicate or steal?" He said: "Yes, however much Abū Dardāʾ might disagree!"'

Author's comments: There is an issue with this narration, for fear (*khawf*) of God's standing is incompatible with the commission of these mortal sins. In fact, a tradition that runs directly contrary to this narration is transmitted from the very same Abū al-Dardāʾ in *al-Durr al-manthūr*. Ibn Jarīr and Ibn al-Mundhir relate from Yasār, a freedman of Muʿāwiya's family, from Abū al-Dardāʾ, concerning the verse '*For him who fears his Lord's standing will be two gardens*.' He said: 'Someone asked: "O Abū al-Dardāʾ! Even if they fornicate and steal?" He said: "Someone who fears the standing of their Lord does not fornicate and they do not steal."'

(4) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, concerning the verse '*of restrained glances*' (55:56), we read: 'Gazes are restrained from the houris because of the brilliance of their luminance.'

(5) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, Ibn Mardawayh narrates from Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad, from his father, from his grandfather, from the Prophet, concerning the verse '*of restrained glances*': 'They do not look except to their spouses.'

(6) In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, regarding the verse '*As though they were rubies and corals*' (55:58), there is a tradition which states that the marrow of a damsel of paradise's leg can be seen beneath seventy layers of silk.

Author's comments: There are a number of narrations that convey a similar meaning.

(7) In *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, with a chain of narration going back to ʿAlī b. Sālim, who said: 'I heard Abū ʿAbd Allāh say: "There is a verse in the Book of God that decides every judgement." I said: "What is it?" He said: "God's saying: '*Is the requital of goodness anything but goodness?*' (55:60). It applies to the disbeliever and the believer, the virtuous and

the wicked. Whoever does good to another should be requited with goodness, but to requite goodness does not mean to merely do what the other person has done, for if you do as they did, then they have done more than you by virtue of going first.'"

(8) And in *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, regarding the verse '*Is the requital of goodness anything but goodness?*', there is a narration in which Anas b. Mālik says: 'The Messenger of God recited this verse and said: "Do you know what your Lord says?" The people said: "God and His Messenger know better!" He said: "Surely your Lord says: 'Is the recompense of those We have blessed with divine unity (*tawḥīd*) anything but paradise?'"'

(9) And in *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, regarding the same verse, we read: 'Is the recompense of those I have blessed with knowledge (*maʿrifa*) anything but paradise?'

Author's comments: The narration is transmitted from the Prophet and the Imams of the Prophet's Family and in the *Tawḥīd* it is traced to Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad, from his forefathers, from ʿAlī, from the Prophet. It is worded thus: 'Surely God almighty says: "The reward of those I have blessed with divine unity is nothing but paradise."' In *ʿIlal al-sharāʾiʿ* it is traced back to al-Ḥasan b. ʿAlī from the Prophet, and it is worded as follows: 'Is the recompense of the one who says "there is no god but God" anything but paradise?'

The narration appears with a variety of wordings in *al-Durr al-manthūr* via different chains of narration from the Prophet, but all of them reproduce the wording of 'those I have blessed,' which shows that even the good done by the servant is, in reality, another form of good done by God for them.

(10) In *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, concerning the verse '*Beneath these two, there will be two other gardens*,' it is narrated from al-ʿAlāʾ b. Sayyāba, who told Abū ʿAbd Allāh: 'People are amazed by our belief that people will come out of hell and enter paradise, and they ask us: "Will these inmates of hell really be in the company of God's friends in paradise?"' He said: 'O ʿAlī, God says: "*Beneath these two, there will be two other gardens.*" So they will not be with God's friends.'

(11) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, Ibn Jarīr, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, and Ibn Mardawayh narrate from Abū Mūsā from the Prophet, concerning the verses: '*For him who fears his Lord's standing will be two gardens*' and '*Beneath these two, there will be two other gardens*,' that he said: 'Two gardens of gold for Those Brought Near, and two gardens of greenery for the Companions of the Right.'

Author's comments: These two narrations above confirm what we have said previously about these verses.

(12) Also in *al-Durr al-manthūr*, al-Ṭabarānī and Ibn Mardawayh narrate from Abū Ayyūb: 'I asked the Prophet about the verse: "Dark green" (55:64) and he said: "Two verdant gardens."'

(13) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, with a chain of narrators going back to Yūnus b. Ẓibyān, from Abū 'Abd Allāh, concerning the verse: *two gushing springs* (55:66), he said: 'Flowing copiously.'

(14) And also in *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, concerning the verse *In them are maidens good and lovely*, (55:70) he says: 'Maidens who sprout like plants around the pool of Kawthar; whenever one of them is picked, another sprouts in her place.'

(15) In *Majma' al-bayān*, concerning the verse *In them are maidens good and lovely*, we read: 'Meaning women of good manners and beautiful faces,' narrated by Umm Salama from the Prophet.

(16) And in *Man lā yaḥḍuruh al-faqīh*, it is narrated from al-Ṣādiq: 'Good and lovely women of this world, and they are even more beautiful than the houris.'

(17) In *Rawḍat al-Kāfī*, it is narrated with a chain going back to al-Ḥalabī: 'I asked Abū 'Abd Allāh about God's saying *In them are maidens good and lovely*, and he told me: "They are the righteous believing women with spiritual knowledge."'

Author's comments: Based on the context of the verse, there is some ambiguity about how the meaning of these two narrations can be reconciled with it.

~ End of Chapter 55 ~

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Chapter 56

Sūrah al-Wāqiʿa (‘The Imminent Event’)

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بِسۡمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the most Merciful, the most Compassionate

Verses 1–10

This chapter depicts the Greater Resurrection (*al-Qiyāma al-Kubrā*), in which humankind will be resurrected from their graves, held to account for their deeds, and recompensed for them. It begins, first, by describing some of the terrors that will befall the human being and the world he inhabits; how its usual state of affairs will be overturned and thrown into disarray. Some things will be lowered and others raised. The earth will quake forcefully, and the mountains will be ground to dust. People will be divided into three overall groups—The People of Good Fortune, The People of Ill Fortune, and the Foremost Ones. The Qur’an details what will become of each of the three groups.

After this, it addresses its arguments to The People of Ill Fortune, who deny God’s lordship, the truth of the Resurrection, and reject the message of the Qur’an which calls them to monotheism and belief in the Hereafter. The chapter concludes by describing the last moments before a person’s death and the division of humanity into the three aforementioned groups.

Based on the context, content, and tone of its verses, this chapter is of Meccan provenance.

إِذَا وَقَعَتِ الْوَاقِعَةُ ۝١

(56:1) *When the Imminent Event befalls* (idhā waqaʿat al-Wāqiʿa)

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The verb *wuqūʿ* means for an event to take place, while *al-Wāqiʿa* (‘the Imminent Event’) is an adjective (*ṣifa*) that describes any event. Here, it refers to the event of the Resurrection and is used as a proper name as if to say that the event is so well known that there is no need to mention the noun. This is why some scholars have said that *al-Wāqiʿa* is one of the names given to the

Resurrection in the Qur'an, akin to *al-Ḥāqqa* ('the Besieger'), *al-Qāriʿa* ('the Catastrophe'), or *al-Ghāshiya* ('the Enveloper').

The sentence, *When the Imminent Event befalls*, is constructed like the antecedent (or condition) of a conditional sentence, but no consequent (that is, what will happen *When the Imminent Event befalls*) for it is given. This is in order to aggrandize and magnify the importance of the Resurrection. In any case, the implicit meaning of the consequent can be known from the content of the chapter detailing the condition of the people on the Day of Judgement, in short: '*When the Imminent Event befalls*, the faithful will triumph and the faithless will lose.'

لَيْسَ لِوَقْعَتِهَا كَاذِبَةٌ ﴿٢﴾

(56:2) *there is no denying that it will befall* (laysa li waqʿatihā kādhiba)

In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, we read:

> '*Kādhiba* is an infinitive like *ʿāfiya* or *ʿāqiba* (as opposed to an active participle, which it resembles in form).'

Therefore, the meaning of this verse is as follows: 'There is no denying its occurrence and its incidence.' Others have said that *kādhiba* is, in fact, an adjective (meaning 'false') with an implicit noun, which would render the meaning: 'Its occurrence is not something false.'

خَافِضَةٌ رَافِعَةٌ ﴿٣﴾

(56:3) *lowering, raising* (khāfiḍa, rāfiʿa)

These are both descriptions of the Imminent Event. *Khāfiḍa* and *rāfiʿa* are opposites to one another, and describing the Imminent Event with both of them is intended to convey the fact that this event will overturn the entirety of the cosmic order that governs the material realm. When this happens, the secrets of the universe will become known, while these are currently veiled. At the same time, the usual chain of cause and effect that is visible today will disappear; the mighty disbelievers and sinners will be humbled and the Godwary will be made mighty.

إِذَا رُجَّتِ الْأَرْضُ رَجًّا ﴿٤﴾

(56:4) *When the earth is shaken violently* (rujjat rajjan)

The verb *rajj* signifies intense movement and is used here in reference to the quaking that will take place when the Hour sets in, which God magnifies in the Qur'an, in the verse, *Indeed the quake of the Hour is a terrible thing* (22:1), and in the present verse because it speaks about the shaking of the entire earth. It emphasizes its severity by using the absolute object *rajjan* without any sort of adjective, as if to say that its shaking is so powerful as to be beyond description. This sentence is either an extension (*badal*) or explanation (*bayān*) of the first verse of the chapter, *When the Imminent Event befalls*.

وَبُسَّتِ الْجِبَالُ بَسًّا ﴿٥﴾ فَكَانَتْ هَبَاءً مُنْبَثًّا ﴿٦﴾

(56:5–6) *and the mountains are shattered into bits* (bussat al–jibāl bassan) *and become scattered dust* (habā'an munbaththan),

This follows on from the previous verse; *bass* means for a body to be ground down and reduced to a fine dust like flour. Some have said it means for them to be set in motion, as per the verse, *and the mountains will be set moving* (78:20).

As for *habā'*, some have said it refers to dust; others have said it refers to the motes of dust that are visible in a sunbeam that enters through an aperture. Meanwhile, *inbithāth* means to be dispersed or spread out.

Based on this, the meaning of the verse is clear.

وَكُنْتُمْ أَزْوَاجًا ثَلَاثَةً ﴿٧﴾

(56:7) *you will be three groups* (azwājan thalātha)

Azwāj is the plural of *zawj* and is used here in the sense of class or category (rather than partner). This verse is addressed to all humankind.

فَأَصْحَابُ الْمَيْمَنَةِ مَا أَصْحَابُ الْمَيْمَنَةِ ﴿٨﴾

(56:8) *The People of Good Fortune* (aṣḥāb al–maymana)—*and what are The People of Good Fortune?*

This follows on from the previous verse in that it begins to explain who these three groups are—an explanation that is continued in the subsequent two verses.

Maymana is derived from *yumn* ('success' or 'good fortune'), the opposite of *shu'm* ('calamity' or 'misfortune'). Therefore, The People of Good Fortune (*aṣḥāb al-maymana*) are the people of felicity and success, while The People

of Ill Fortune (*aṣḥāb al-mash'ama*) are the people of misery and calamities. The view that *maymana* refers to the 'right hand' (*yamīn*) because they will be given the record of their deeds in their right hands, while others will be given the record of their deeds in their left hands is to be rejected. This is because here *aṣḥāb al-maymana* is contrasted with *aṣḥāb al-mash'ama*, and *mash'ama* refers not to the left hand but to ill fortune, whereas if the left hand was meant, the Qur'an would have called them *aṣḥāb al-shimāl*, as is obvious.

As for the question, *and what are The People of Good Fortune?*, its answer is, *The People of Good Fortune*. The construction of this verse is intended to magnify and aggrandize them.

وَأَصْحَابُ الْمَشْأَمَةِ مَا أَصْحَابُ الْمَشْأَمَةِ ﴿٩﴾

(56:9) *And The People of Ill Fortune* (aṣḥāb al–mash'ama)—*and what are The People of Ill Fortune?*

Mash'ama is derived from *shu'um* just as *maymana* is derived from *yamīn*, and *maymana* and *mash'ama* refer to felicity and misery respectively.

وَالسَّابِقُونَ السَّابِقُونَ ﴿١٠﴾

(56:10) *And the Foremost Ones are the foremost ones*

The most appropriate verses to explain the identity of *the Foremost Ones* (in the first instance) are: *Yet some of them are those who wrong themselves, and some of them are average, and some of them are those who take the lead in all the good works by Allah's will* (35:32); *Everyone has a cynosure to which he turns; so take the lead in all good works* (2:148); *it is they who are zealous in good works, and take the lead in them* (23:61);

Therefore, the meaning of *the Foremost Ones* in its first instance in this verse are those who take the lead and are foremost in good works. Then, when they take the lead in good works, they are the foremost in receiving God's forgiveness and mercy in response. See, for example, the verse, *Take the lead towards forgiveness from your Lord and a paradise* (57:21). Therefore, those who take the lead in good works are the first to receive God's mercy. This is the meaning of *the Foremost Ones are the foremost ones*.

Some have said that the second instance of *the foremost ones* in the verse refers back to the first instance, akin to the poem:

'I am Abū al-Najm, and my poetry is my poetry (*shi'rī shi'rī*).'

The verse, *The Foremost Ones are the foremost ones* is subject and predicate.

Some have said that the first instance of *The Foremost Ones* is the subject of a sentence, and the second instance is repetition for emphasis.

Scholars have also suggested a number of possible interpretations of *The Foremost Ones*. Some have said that they are the ones who hasten to everything that God calls them towards. Others say that they were the ones who were the first to belief and obedience and embraced both without delay. Others still say that they are the prophets because they were the pioneers of the people of faith. Then there are some who say that this refers to the believer from Pharaoh's people, and Ḥabīb Najjār, who is the believer mentioned in Sūrah Yāsīn (36:20), and ʿAlī, who was the first to believe in the Prophet and is the best of the Foremost Ones. Others say that the Foremost Ones are those who hastened to emigrate to Medina. Others still say that they are those who hasten to their five daily prayers. Still others say that this term refer to those believers who prayed towards both *qibla*s. Then some say that they are the ones who hasten to strive in the way of God. And there are other opinions besides this.

The first two opinions cited here both return to the interpretation we have offered; the third and fourth are best understood as providing exemplars (*tamthīl*) for the Foremost Ones; while the remainder are evidently weak, unless these too are understood as highlighting exemplary characteristics of those described by the verse.

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Examining Narrations

(1) In *al-Khiṣāl*, al-Ṣadūq narrates from al-Zuhrī, 'I heard ʿAlī b. al-Ḥusayn say, "Whoever does not take consolation in God will spend his life in this world consumed by regret. By God, this world and the hereafter are naught but akin to the two sides of a scale; when one is heavy, the other is light. *When the Imminent Event befalls*—meaning the Resurrection—*there is no denying that it will befall, lowering*—by God, the enemies of God will be lowered into Hell—*raising*—by God, the friends of God will be raised to Paradise."'

(2) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, we read: *When the Imminent Event befalls, there is no denying that it will befall*—he said, 'the Resurrection is true'—*lowering*—'the enemies of God'—*raising*—'the friends of God'—*When the earth is shaken violently*—'when its parts crash together'—*and the mountains are shattered into bits*—'the mountains are torn out at their roots'—*and become scattered dust*—like the motes you see floating in a sunbeam.
You will be three groups—the Day of Resurrection— *The People of*

Good Fortune—and what are The People of Good Fortune? And The People of Ill Fortune—and what are The People of Ill Fortune? And the Foremost Ones are the foremost ones—those who will be foremost in reaching Paradise.

Author's comments: When al-Qummī says 'those who will be foremost in reaching Paradise', this is an explanation of the second instance of *the foremost ones* in the verse.

(3) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, al-Suyūṭī cites ʿAbd b. Ḥamīd, Ibn Jarīr, and Ibn al-Mundhir, who narrate from ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, *Dust* (56:6) refers to the scattered motes which you see hovering in sunlight.'

(4) In the same source, he cites Ibn Mardawayh, who narrates from Ibn ʿAbbās about the verse, *the Foremost Ones are the foremost ones*: 'It was revealed about Ḥazaqīl, the believer from the people of Pharaoh, Ḥabīb al-Najjār, who is mentioned in *Yāsīn*, and ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib. Each of them was the foremost of their people, and ʿAlī was the best of them in precedence.'

(5) In *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, al-Ṭabrisī quotes Imām al-Bāqir as saying: 'The Foremost Ones are four persons: The slain son of Adam, the forerunner of Moses' nation—the believer from Pharaoh's people, the forerunner of Jesus' nation—Ḥabīb al-Najjār, and the forerunning of Muḥammad's nation—ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib.'

Author's comments: A tradition with the same meaning is also narrated in *Rawḍat al-wāʿiẓīn* from Imām al-Ṣādiq.

(6) In his *Amālī*, al-Shaykh al-Mufīd narrates via his chain of transmission from Ibn ʿAbbās: 'I asked the Messenger of God about the verse, *And the Foremost Ones are the foremost ones, they are the ones brought near*, *in the gardens of bliss* (56:10–12). He said, "Gabriel told me, 'These are ʿAlī and his supporters (*shīʿa*), they are the foremost in reaching paradise, where they are brought near to God by virtue of His grace to them.'"'

(7) In *Kamāl al-dīn*, al-Ṣadūq relates via his chain of narrators from Khaythama al-Kuʿfī, from Imām al-Bāqir the tradition: 'We are the *Foremost ones are the foremost ones* and we are *the later ones* (56:14).'

(8) In *ʿUyūn akhbār al-Riḍā*, in the chapter *Bāb mā jāʾ ʿan al-Riḍā min al-akhbār al-majmūʿa*, al-Ṣadūq narrates via a chain of transmitters going back to ʿAlī: 'The verse, *and the Foremost Ones are the foremost ones, they are the ones brought near*, was revealed about me.'

(9) In *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, about the same verse, al-Ṭabrisī writes: 'It is

said this refers to those who hasten to the five daily prayers. This is narrated from 'Alī.'

Author's comments: The proper understanding of all of these narrations is that they are providing exemplars of the Foremost Ones, as we have already discussed.

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Verses 11–56

This tranche of verses describes in detail what will become of each of the three groups of humankind mentioned in the previous section on the Day of Resurrection.

أُولَٰئِكَ الْمُقَرَّبُونَ ﴿١١﴾ فِي جَنَّاتِ النَّعِيمِ ﴿١٢﴾

(56:11–12) ***those are the ones brought near in the gardens of bliss***

The demonstrative pronoun *those* refers to *the Foremost Ones* mentioned in the previous verse. *Those are the ones brought near* is a nominal sentence and a stand-alone statement. Some have suggested that the sentence is a predicate of *the Foremost Ones*. Others have said it is in the position of a subject and its predicate is *in the gardens of bliss*. However, the first interpretation is the most appropriate for the context of the verses, which first concerns the division of humankind into three groups and then the details of what will become of each of them.

The concepts of nearness (*qurb*) and remoteness (*bu'd*) are complimentary opposites, which are, in the first instance, applied to bodies based on the location in relation to one another in space. Then, the meanings of these terms expanded to include non-spatial meanings, such as time. For example, one might say that 'tomorrow is close to today', 'Wednesday is closer than Thursday to Tuesday', or 'green is closer to black than to white.' Finally, these terms expanded to include non-corporeal realities.

For this reason, nearness is used as a description of God to convey the sense that He encompasses all things. For example, God says: ... *When My servants ask you about Me, I am indeed nearmost* ... (2:186); ... *and We are nearer to him than you are* ... (56:85); ... *and We are nearer to him than his jugular vein* ... (50:16).

This idea—that God is nearer to a thing than it is to its own self—is possibly one of the most astonishing conceptualizations of nearness, and we have discussed this in more detail in our commentary on the above verse.

Nearness can also be applied to God's servants in the context of their servanthood (*'ubūdiyya*) as an acquired trait (*amr iktisābī*). The Arabic term *taqarrub* ('drawing near') is used to denote this; God's servant draws near

to Him through righteous deeds, and when the servant draws near to God, this means that he reaches a place to be enveloped by divine mercy, where the sources of misery and deprivation are removed from him. At the same time, God draws near (*taqarrub*) to His servant by admitting him to a station where he receives a special degree of divine grace, mercy, and forgiveness. God says, *It is a written record, witnessed by those brought near* (83:21); *and whose seasoning is from Tasnim, a spring where those brought near drink* (83:28).

Therefore, those brought near (*al-muqarrabūn*) represent the highest rank of the people of felicity, as indicated by the verse, *And the Foremost Ones are the foremost ones, they are the ones brought near* (56:10–11). This can only be attained through reaching the apex of divine servanthood, as God says, *The Messiah would never disdain being a servant of Allah, nor would the angels brought near* (4:172). And one cannot reach the apex of divine servanthood except by aligning one's will and one's deeds completely with the will of his Master, so that he will neither act nor want anything other than what He wants. This is what it means to be under God's allegiance (*wilāya*)—these are God's allies and friends (*awliyā'*).

... in the gardens of bliss: Meaning, each of them will be in their own garden of bliss, therefore they will be collectively in gardens of bliss (plural). It is also possible that this means all of them will be in gardens of bliss together, but the likelihood of this interpretation is diminished by the verses at the end of this chapter, *Then, if he be of those brought near, then ease, abundance, and a garden of bliss* (56:88–89).

And we have explained on more than one occasion that the meaning of 'bliss' (*naʿīm*) is divine allegiance (*wilāya*), and that the 'garden of bliss' (*jannat al-naʿīm*) is the paradise of divine allegiance (*jannat al-wilāya*). This fits with what has been said above about those brought near (*muqarrabūn*) being the people of divine allegiance (*ahl wilāyat Allāh*).

ثُلَّةٌ مِنَ الْأَوَّلِينَ ﴿١٣﴾ وَقَلِيلٌ مِنَ الْآخِرِينَ ﴿١٤﴾

(56:13–14) *A multitude* (thulla) *from the former ones and a few from the latter ones*

According to some scholars, *thulla* means a large group. '*The former ones*' refers to the past nations of earlier prophets, while '*the latter ones*' refers to the present nation. This is based on how God has typically used these terms elsewhere in the Qur'an, such as the forthcoming verse, *'... shall we be resurrected? And our forefathers too?' Say, 'Indeed the former and latter generations*

will all be gathered for the tryst of a known day' (56:47–50).

Therefore, the meaning of these two verses is: 'Those brought near will be a large group from the past nations and a few from this nation.'

Based on this, it is evident that the interpretation that says the meaning of '*the former ones*' and '*the latter ones*' are the former ones of the Prophet's nation and the latter ones is incorrect.

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عَلَىٰ سُرُرٍ مَّوْضُونَةٍ ﴿١٥﴾ مُّتَّكِـِٔينَ عَلَيْهَا مُتَقَابِلِينَ ﴿١٦﴾

(56:15–16) *On brocaded couches, reclining on them, face to face* (mutaqābilīn)

The ones reclining on these couches are those brought near. *Face to face* is an adverb qualifying the verb *reclining*. The image of them reclining face to face is meant to convey their friendliness, sincerity of heart, and camaraderie. They do not turn their backs to one another, nor do they reproach one another or backbite about one another.

Therefore, the meaning of the verse is: 'They—those brought near—are seated on brocaded couches, reclining on them while the face one another.'

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يَطُوفُ عَلَيْهِمْ وِلْدَانٌ مُّخَلَّدُونَ ﴿١٧﴾

(56:17) *They will be frequented* (yaṭūf) *by immortal youths* (wildān mukhalladūn)

Wildān is the plural of *walad* ('child'), which here denotes a serving boy (*ghulām*). The verb *yaṭūf* ('frequent') refers to the fact that these youths will be coming and going in service of those brought near. *Mukhalladūn* ('immortal') refers to the fact that they will live forever and remain unfadingly youthful.

Some have suggested that *mukhalladūn* is derived from *khalad*, meaning 'earring.' Therefore, the youths of paradise are adorned by earrings.

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بِأَكْوَابٍ وَأَبَارِيقَ وَكَأْسٍ مِّن مَّعِينٍ ﴿١٨﴾

(56:18) *with goblets* (akwāb) *and ewers* (abārīq) *and a cup* (ka's) *of a clear wine* (ma'īn)

Akwāb is the plural of *kūb*, which is a drinking vessel that has neither a handle nor a spout, while *abārīq* is the plural of *ibrīq*, which is a drinking vessel that has a spout—some lexicographers say that it has both a handle and a spout—while *ka's* ('cup') is well known. Some have said that '*cup*' is singular

because it isn't called a *ka's* unless it is full. *Ma'īn* refers to wine that is poured visibly in front of a person.

لَا يُصَدَّعُونَ عَنْهَا وَلَا يُنْزِفُونَ ﴿١٩﴾

(56:19) ***which neither causes them headache nor stupefaction***

In other words, they will not experience a headache on account of the wine, which is what people suffer when they drink wine in this world, neither will they lose their good sense on account of the drunkenness caused by it.

وَفَاكِهَةٍ مِمَّا يَتَخَيَّرُونَ ﴿٢٠﴾ وَلَحْمِ طَيْرٍ مِمَّا يَشْتَهُونَ ﴿٢١﴾

(56:20–21) ***and such fruits as they prefer and such flesh of fowls as they desire***

The words *such fruits* and *such flesh of fowls* are joined by *and* to *with goblets*. In other words: 'Immortal youths will frequent them with such fruits as they prefer and such flesh of fowls as their desire.'

This does not conflict with the narrations that say that when the inhabitants of paradise desire fruits, the branches of the trees of paradise lower themselves so that they can pick the fruits from them. Or that when they desire the flesh of fowls, these birds land fried or grilled into their hands and they eat as much as they want, then the birds come back to life take flight again. This is because the inhabitants of paradise will have whatever they want, and it is part of the art of hosting guests for a feast that they are given whatever they desire by the hands of servants, especially when they are gathered together in an assembly. This is just as it is artful for them to take these things for themselves without the mediation of servants.

وَحُورٌ عِينٌ ﴿٢٢﴾ كَأَمْثَالِ اللُّؤْلُؤِ الْمَكْنُونِ ﴿٢٣﴾

(56:22–23) ***and big-eyed houris like guarded pearls***

This is one part of a nominal sentence, its other part is implicit, and—based on the context of the verse—should be understood as '*and* for them shall be *big-eyed houris*' or '*and* therein are *big-eyed houris*.' *Big-eyed houris* are the women of paradise, and we have already discussed the meaning of the Arabic name *hūr al-'ayn* in our commentary on Sūrah al-Dukhkhān.

... *like guarded pearls*—meaning pearls kept safe in oysters, untouched by human hands, and of the utmost purity.

جَزَاءً بِمَا كَانُوا يَعْمَلُونَ ﴿٢٤﴾

(56:24) ***a reward for what they used to do***

This verse qualifies everything above and is an object of purpose (*maf'ūl lahu*). Therefore, the meaning is: 'We will do all of this for them as a reward for them in return for the righteous deeds they did continuously during their lives.'

لَا يَسْمَعُونَ فِيهَا لَغْوًا وَلَا تَأْثِيمًا ﴿٢٥﴾

(56:25) ***They will not hear therein any vain talk*** **(laghw)** ***or sinful speech*** **(ta'thīm)**

Laghw ('vain talk') means talk that has neither any benefit or effect, while *ta'thīm* ('sinful speech') means to attribute sinfulness to someone. In other words, none of them will say anything to their comrades that is without benefit or attribute any sinfulness to one another, for there is no sin in Paradise. Some have interpreted *sinful speech* to mean lying.

إِلَّا قِيلًا سَلَامًا سَلَامًا ﴿٢٦﴾

(56:26) ***but only the watchword, 'Peace!' 'Peace!'***

The exception here does not mean to imply that this watchword is vain talk or sinful speech. The repetition of the phrase *'Peace!'* is meant to show this is something they frequently say. Therefore, the meaning is: 'All they will say is 'peace!' time and again.'

Some have suggested that the Arabic could also be understood as, 'except sound speech.'

وَأَصْحَابُ الْيَمِينِ مَا أَصْحَابُ الْيَمِينِ ﴿٢٧﴾

(56:27) ***And the People of the Right Hand—what are the People of the Right Hand?***

Now the chapter turns to discuss the fate of *the People of Good Fortune* (aṣḥāb al-maymana), mentioned above. The fact that this turns from *the People of Good Fortune* to *the People of the Right Hand* shows that the two groups are one and the same, namely that the People of Good Fortune are the ones who will receive the record of their deeds in their right hand. The question posed

in this verse is rhetorical and intended to magnify their status and convey amazement at their state.

فِي سِدْرٍ مَّخْضُودٍ ﴿٢٨﴾ وَطَلْحٍ مَّنضُودٍ ﴿٢٩﴾

(56:28–29) ***Amid thornless lote trees and clustered spathes***

The word '*spathes*' here is a reference to banana trees. Some have said that it does not refer only to bananas, but to any tree with a cool moist shade. Others have said it refers to an acacia tree, which has pleasant smelling leaves. '*Clustered*' refers to things being stacked atop one another. Therefore, the meaning of this is verse is: 'They will be amongst thornless lote trees and gardens of bananas trees, laden with fruits stacked from top to bottom.'

وَظِلٍّ مَّمْدُودٍ ﴿٣٠﴾ وَمَاءٍ مَّسْكُوبٍ ﴿٣١﴾

(56:30–31) ***and extended shade, and ever-flowing water***

Some commentators have said: '*Extended shade*' means shade that is unbroken and never diminished by the sun. Therefore it is everlasting. '*Ever-flowing water*' means water that flows continuously without ending.

وَفَاكِهَةٍ كَثِيرَةٍ ﴿٣٢﴾ لَّا مَقْطُوعَةٍ وَلَا مَمْنُوعَةٍ ﴿٣٣﴾

(56:32–33) ***and abundant fruits neither limited, nor restricted,***

In other words, these fruits are not only available at some times but not others like fruits of this world that are unavailable in winter or other seasons. Neither is there anything preventing them from taking these fruits, such as an impediment internal to them, such as distaste or fullness, or an external obstacle such as their being out of reach, guarded by thorns, or the like thereof.

وَفُرُشٍ مَّرْفُوعَةٍ ﴿٣٤﴾

(56:34) ***and noble spouses*** **(furush marfūʿa)**

Furush is the plural of *firāsh*, literally meaning 'carpet.' However, some have said that the meaning of *furush marfūʿa* are women who are elevated in their intelligence, beauty, and perfection, as the word *firāsh* can also refer to a woman. This accords with the meaning of the following verse, *We have created them with a special creation*.

إِنَّا أَنْشَأْنَاهُنَّ إِنْشَاءً ﴿٣٥﴾ فَجَعَلْنَاهُنَّ أَبْكَارًا ﴿٣٦﴾ عُرُبًا أَتْرَابًا ﴿٣٧﴾

(56:35–37) ***We have created them with a special creation and made them virgins, loving, of a like age,***

In other words, 'We have made them special and given them a special upbringing.' This suggests that they do not change with age or with the passage of time. When God says, *and made them virgins*, this means that no matter how many times they have intercourse with their spouses, they remain virgins.

Loving, of a like age—In other words, loving of their spouses or attracted to them and of a similar age to them.

لِأَصْحَابِ الْيَمِينِ ﴿٣٨﴾ ثُلَّةٌ مِنَ الْأَوَّلِينَ ﴿٣٩﴾ وَثُلَّةٌ مِنَ الْآخِرِينَ ﴿٤٠﴾

(56:38–40) ***for the People of the Right Hand. A multitude from the former ones and a multitude from the latter ones.***

The meaning of this is clear based on what has already been said above. These verses show that the People of the Right hand contain a multitude of the believers from the Prophet's nation, just as it contains a multitude of earlier nations. By contrast, the Foremost Ones, the ones who are brought near, contain fewer members of the Prophet's nation than they do the members of earlier nations.

وَأَصْحَابُ الشِّمَالِ مَا أَصْحَابُ الشِّمَالِ ﴿٤١﴾

(56:41) ***And the People of the Left Hand—what are the People of the Left Hand?***

The grammatical structure of this verse is similar to that about the People of the Right Hand (56:27). The question is intended to express horror and amazement. Note that, here as well, *the People of Ill Fortune* has been swapped with *the People of the Left Hand* to show that the two are the same and that they will receive the record of their deeds in their left hand, as we saw with the People of the Right hand, above.

فِي سَمُومٍ وَحَمِيمٍ ﴿٤٢﴾ وَظِلٍّ مِنْ يَحْمُومٍ ﴿٤٣﴾ لَا بَارِدٍ وَلَا كَرِيمٍ ﴿٤٤﴾

(56:42–44) ***Amid infernal miasma*** **(samūm)** ***and boiling water*** **(ḥamīm)** ***and the shadow of a dense black smoke*** **(yaḥmūm)** ***neither cool nor beneficial.***

According to al-Zamakhsharī in the *Kashshāf*, the term *samūm* refers to the heat of the fire that penetrates the body's pores, while *ḥamīm* is extremely hot water. Both of these words are left indefinite in order to emphasise their gravity. *Yaḥmūm* signifies thick dark smoke.

Neither cool nor beneficial refers to the shadow rather than the smoke, because one typically expects a shadow—but not smoke—to be cool and refreshing.

إِنَّهُمْ كَانُوا قَبْلَ ذَٰلِكَ مُتْرَفِينَ ﴿٤٥﴾

(56:45) *Indeed they had been affluent* (mutrafīn) *before this*

This verse explains why the People of the Left Hand are being punished, where '*before this*' refers to the description of their punishment on the Day of Resurrection. *Mutrafīn* ('affluent') means that the blessings they enjoyed in this world caused them to become proud and disobedient, this is because they become preoccupied with these blessings and forgot everything else. An "affluent" person is someone who is attached to his worldly possessions and whatever he benefits he seeks to obtain through them, regardless of whether he has a little or a lot.

One cannot object that many of the People of the Left Hand are not, in fact, affluent in the sense of being materially wealthy. This is because the reality is that the human being is surrounded by blessings from his Lord; wealth is not the only blessing, so when we say that a person is distracted from the remembrance of his Lord by his Lord's blessings, this is referring to the comfort he receives from Him.

Therefore, the verse means: 'We will only punish them in the manner We have described because before, when they were in this world, the blessings they enjoyed caused them to become disobedient.'

وَكَانُوا يُصِرُّونَ عَلَى الْحِنثِ الْعَظِيمِ ﴿٤٦﴾

(56:46) *and they used to persist* (yuṣirrūn) *in the great sin* (al–ḥinth al–ʿaẓīm)

According to al-Ṭabrisī in *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, *ḥinth* means to violate one's solemn oath; *yuṣirrūn* means to continue doing something without stopping. The context of this verse suggests that when God says they *used to persist in the great sin*, this means that they arrogantly refused to be servants of their Lord. This was in violation of the oath they had sworn to Him through their

innate nature (*fiṭra*) and through the pledge (*mīthāq*) that they had given to Him in the realm of atoms (*ʿālam al-dharr*). In spite of this, they ga ve their obedience to other than God, and this is the pinnacle of idolatry.

Some have said that *ḥinth* already means a great sin, and that the adjective *great* (ʿaẓīm) is used here for hyperbole, and *the great sin* in this case is idolatry (*shirk*). Others have said that *the great sin* is used here to denote the category of major sins as a whole. Others still have said it refers to the oaths they swore to deny the truth of the Resurrection, as alluded to by the verse, *They swear by Allah with solemn oaths that Allah will not resurrect those who die* (16:38).

وَكَانُوا يَقُولُونَ أَئِذَا مِتْنَا وَكُنَّا تُرَابًا وَعِظَامًا أَإِنَّا لَمَبْعُوثُونَ ﴿٤٧﴾ أَوَآبَاؤُنَا الْأَوَّلُونَ ﴿٤٨﴾

(56:47–48) ***And they used to say, 'What! When we are dead and become dust and bones, shall we be resurrected? And our forefathers too?'***

This is a statement from those who deny the Resurrection because they think it is improbable. Therefore, they emphasise their own denial of the Resurrection by linking it to the resurrection of their forefathers, because the resurrection of their forefathers seems even more unlikely to them than their own resurrection.

قُلْ إِنَّ الْأَوَّلِينَ وَالْآخِرِينَ ﴿٤٩﴾ لَمَجْمُوعُونَ إِلَىٰ مِيقَاتِ يَوْمٍ مَعْلُومٍ ﴿٥٠﴾

(56:49–50) ***Say, 'Indeed the former and latter generations will all be gathered for the tryst*** **(mīqāt)** ***of a known day.'***

The command, '*Say*', is addressed to the Prophet—it commands him to respond to their denial of the Resurrection by affirming it, before informing them of the food and drink they will taste on the Day of Resurrection—which is Zaqqūm and boiling water.

In short, they are being told that the earlier and later generations will be gathered and mustered for an appointment on a known day. Note that this verse does not draw a distinction between the earlier and later generations. This is in contrast to the idolaters, who drew this distinction between the two because they considered their own resurrection to be unlikely and the resurrection of their forefathers even more unlikely, whereas in reality there is no distinction between the two eventualities.

A *mīqāt* (tryst) is the specific time appointed for a thing. Here, *a known day* refers to the Day of Resurrection, whose time is known to God. Therefore attaching *tryst* to *a known day* is expository (indicating what is known about it).

ثُمَّ إِنَّكُمْ أَيُّهَا الضَّالُّونَ الْمُكَذِّبُونَ ﴿٥١﴾ لَآكِلُونَ مِنْ شَجَرٍ مِنْ زَقُّومٍ ﴿٥٢﴾ فَمَالِئُونَ مِنْهَا الْبُطُونَ ﴿٥٣﴾

(56:51–53) *'Then indeed, you, astray deniers, will surely eat from the tree of Zaqqūm* (min shajarin min Zaqqūm) *and stuff your bellies with it* (min–hā)*'*

This is a continuation of the Prophet's speech in the previous verse. In it, he informs the idolaters what will become of them on the Day of Resurrection and the food and drink they will experience.

By addressing them as '*astray deniers*', this highlights the traits that have rendered them the people of misery and loss on the Day of Judgement—namely their being astray from the path of truth. It also shows that these traits have become part of their character because of their continuous and obstinate denial of the truth and their persistence in sinning. If they were merely astray, without having also denied the truth, then there would be hope that they might be guided and saved rather than perish.

Note that the preposition *min* in *min Zaqqūm* ('the tree of Zaqqūm') is expository (*bayāniyya*; it explains the species of the tree), or it could show that it is an extension (*badal*) of *min shajarin*. The pronoun '*it*' in *stuff your bellies with it* refers to either the tree or its fruit. The words tree (*shajar*) and fruit (*thamar*) can be either masculine or feminine, hence in this verse the pronoun '*it*' is feminine, while in the next verse, the pronoun '*it*' in '*on top of it*' is masculine. The remainder of the verse's meaning is clear.

فَشَارِبُونَ عَلَيْهِ مِنَ الْحَمِيمِ ﴿٥٤﴾ فَشَارِبُونَ شُرْبَ الْهِيمِ ﴿٥٥﴾

(56:54–55) *'and drink boiling water* (ḥamīm) *on top of it, drinking like thirsty camels* (hīm).*'*

'*On top of it*' indicates that they drink the boiling water immediately after eating from the Zaqqūm tree; *ḥīm* is the plural of *haymā' al-ibil*, which denotes a camel afflicted by *huyām*, or an unquenchable thirst. This causes the camel to drink water until it dies or becomes gravely ill. Some have said *hīm*

denotes a patch of dry ground that absorbs water and is never filled.

Therefore, the meaning of the verse is: 'Then, after eating of the Zaqqūm tree, they will drink extremely hot water. In spite of its heat, they will drink it without being quenched, like thirsty camels or parched earth.' This is the end of what God instructs the Prophet to tell the idolaters.

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هَٰذَا نُزُلُهُمْ يَوْمَ الدِّينِ ﴿٥٦﴾

(56:56) ***Such will be the hospitality*** **(nuzul)** ***they receive on the Day of Retribution***

In other words, on the Day of Recompense, this is the food and drink that will be offered to God's guests out of hospitality.

Therefore, the meaning of the verse is: 'The food and drink described here is the hospitality that the astray deniers will receive.' Calling it 'hospitality' (*nuzul*) is a form of mockery, and this verse is addressed to the Prophet. Now, were this part of the Prophet's speech to the idolaters, it would say instead: '*Such will be the hospitality* you *receive...*'

Examining Narrations

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(1) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, al-Suyūṭī cites Ibn Mardawayh and Ibn ʿAsākir, who narrate from ʿUrwa b. Ruwaym, from Jābir b. ʿAbd Allāh: 'When Sūrah al-Wāqiʿa was revealed, it contained the verse, *A multitude from the former ones and a few from the latter ones* (56:13–14). ʿUmar said, 'O Messenger of God, surely it should be "a multitude of the former ones and a multitude from the latter ones!"' The Messenger of God said, 'Come and listen to what God has sent down, *A multitude from the former ones and a multitude from the latter ones* (56:39–40).

Lo! Surely there are a multitude between Adam and me, and there is a multitude from our nation, and our multitude will not be complete until we seek the aid of black camel herders who bear witness that there is no god but God alone and without partner.'

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Author's comments: Al-Suyūṭī cites another version of this tradition from Ibn Abī Ḥātim, who narrates from ʿUrwa b. Ruwaym with an incomplete chain of narrators.

(2) Meanwhile Ibn Mardawayh narrates from Abū Hurayra: 'When the verse was revealed, *A multitude from the former ones and a few from the latter ones*, the Companions of the Messenger of God were

> dejected. They said, 'So there will only be a few from the nation of Muḥammad!' Then there was revealed at midday, *A multitude from the former ones and a multitude from the latter ones*. At this, the people embraced one another and this abrogated the verse, *and a few from the latter ones*.'

Author's comments: Al-Zamakhsharī says in his commentary on this verse in *al-Kashshāf*:

> 'If one was to argue that, according to a narration, when this verse was revealed it distressed the Muslims, so the Messenger of God kept supplicating to his Lord until the verse was revealed, *A multitude from the former ones and a multitude from the latter ones*.'

I would respond that this cannot be correct for two reasons. First, the former verse is clearly concerned with the Foremost Ones, while the latter one is concerned with the People of the Right Hand. Is it not obvious that you cannot simply conflate the People of the Right hand and what has been promised to them to the Foremost Ones with what has been promised to them? Second, it is not possible for reports (*akhbār*) to abrogate verses of the Qur'an.'

However, al-Zamakhsharī's opponents might respond to him by saying that it is possible to interpret the tradition as indicating that when the Companions heard the first verse they thought that this would be the fate of their nation, such that the People of Right Hand would be a multitude of the former ones and a few of the latter ones as well. Therefore, relatively fewer members of their nation would succeed in winning paradise compared to those of earlier nations. When the verse was revealed, *A multitude from the former ones and a multitude from the latter ones*, their grief was assuaged. Therefore, the abrogation of the verse in this report is not of the verse itself but of the Companions' understanding of it.

However, readers will be well aware that there is no evidence to suggest such an interpretation from the wording of the verse. In fact, the wording would seem to resist it, especially interpreting the abrogation of the verse as the abrogation of the Companions' understanding of it. And the first narration is akin to this, especially with regards to its ending.

(3) In *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, about the verse, *They will be frequented by immortal youths* (56:17), al-Ṭabrisī writes: 'Scholars have differed about the nature of these youths. Some have said that these are the children of the inhabitants of this world who did not have any good deeds to be rewarded for or wicked deeds to be punished for, so they are given this role instead.

It has been narrated that the Prophet was asked about the deceased children of the idolaters. He responded, "They will be servants to the inhabitants of Paradise."'

Author's comments: Al-Suyūṭī narrates this from al-Ḥasan in *al-Durr al-manthūr*, but the tradition is weak and cannot be relied upon.

(4) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, Ibn Abī al-Dunyā in *Ṣifat al-Janna*, al-Bazzār, Ibn Mardawayh, and al-Bayhaqī in *al-Baʿth* narrate from ʿAbd Allāh b. Masʿūd: 'The Messenger of God told me, "You will see fowl in Paradise and desire to eat it, and it will fall into your hands already grilled."'

Author's comments: There are many narrations in the same vein, some of which say that the believer will eat of whatever he desires, then whatever he has eaten of will return to its former state, come back to life, fly to its former place, and be overjoyed by this.

(5) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, concerning the verse, *They will not hear therein any vain talk or sinful speech* (56:25), we read: 'Indecency, deception, or singing.'

Author's comments: Perhaps the meaning of singing (*ghinā'*) here is what would be considered vain (*lahw*). Alternatively, it may be a scribal corruption of *khinā'* ('obscene language').

(6) In the same source, concerning the verse, *And the People of the Right Hand—what are the People of the Right Hand?*, we read: 'They are ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, his companions, and his followers (*shīʿa*).'

Author's comments: This narration is based on what has been narrated about the verse, *The day We shall summon every group of people with their imam, then whoever is given his book in his right hand* (17:71), that the 'right hand' (*al-yamīn*) refers to the rightful Imām (*al-imām al-ḥaqq*). Therefore, *al-yamīn* is ʿAlī and *aṣḥāb al-yamīn* are his followers (*shīʿa*). This is an example of extending the meaning of the verse beyond its original referent (*jarī*).

(7) In the same source, concerning the verse, *Amid thornless lote trees* (56:28), we read: 'Trees that haver neither leaves nor thorns. Imām al-Ṣādiq recited the verse *talʿin manḍūd*—'palm fronds clustered atop one another.'

(8) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, al-Suyūṭī narrates from al-Ḥākim, who authenticates the tradition, and al-Bayhaqī in *Baʿth* from Abū Umāma: 'The Companions of the Messenger of God would say, "Surely God benefits us through the Bedouins and their questions." A Bedouin came one day and said, "O Messenger of God, God has

mentioned a bothersome tree in the Qur'an, and I did not expect that such a tree would be found in paradise where it can pain its owner!" The Messenger of God asked, "And which tree is that?" The Bedouin said, "The lote tree, for it has thorns." The Messenger of God said, "Does God not say, *Amid thornless lote trees*? God has removed their thorns and placed fruits in their place. It bears such abundant fruits that they continuously fall from it. And they come in seventy-two different flavours, each of which is completely unique."'

(9) In *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, we read: 'The masses (that is, the Sunnīs) narrate from ʿAlī that a man recited the verse in front of him, *and clustered spathes* (56:29), and he said: "What are these 'spathes' (*talḥ*)? Rather, it should be read as 'fronds' (*talʿ*), as in the verse, *farms and date palms with dainty fronds* (26:148)." Someone asked him, "Are you not changing it?" He said, "The Qur'an is neither stirred nor moved today."' This is narrated via Imām al-Ḥasan and Qays b. Saʿd.

(10) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, al-Suyūṭī cites ʿAbd al-Razzāq, al-Fāryābī, Hannād, ʿAbd b. Ḥamīd, Ibn Jarīr, and Ibn Mardawayh, who all narrate from ʿAlī b. Abī Ṭālib, concerning the verse, *and clustered spathes*: 'They are banana plants.'

(11) In *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, it is narrated: 'Paradise contains a tree whose shade is so vast that it would take a rider one hundred years to traverse it and it is never broken. Recite, if you wish, *and extended shade* (56:30).' It is also related: 'All the times of paradise are like Summer mornings; they are neither too hot nor too cold.'

Author's comments: The first of these narrations is also transmitted by al-Suyūṭī in *al-Durr al-manthūr* from Abū Saʿīd, Anas, and others from the Prophet.

(12) In the *Rawḍa* of *al-Kāfī*, al-Kulaynī transmits via his chain from ʿAlī b. Ibrāhīm, from Ibn Maḥbūb, from Muḥammad b. Isḥāq al-Madanī, from Imām al-Bāqir, from the Prophet a tradition which depicts paradise and its inhabitants, a part of which says: 'They visit one another and enjoy the blessings of their gardens in a shade that is akin to the time between daybreak and sunrise, and even more pleasant than that, in fact.'

(13) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, about the verse, *We have created them with a special creation* (56:35), we read: 'These are the Houris in Paradise. *And made them virgins, loving* ('uruban) ... (56:36–37), 'They speak only Arabic.'

(14) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, al-Suyūṭī quotes from Ibn Abī Ḥātim, from Jaʿfar b. Muḥammad, from his father: 'The Messenger of God explained the word *ʿuruban* (56:37) as follows: 'Their speech is Arabic.'

Author's comments: There are other narrations which state that *ʿurub* is the plural of *ʿurūb*, which means 'flirtatious.'

(15) In the same source, Musaddid in his *Musnad*, Ibn al-Mundhir, al-Ṭabarānī, and Ibn Mardawayh all narrate via a good chain (*sanad ḥasan*) from Abū Bakr, from the Prophet, about the verse: *A multitude from the former ones and a multitude from the latter ones* (56:39–40): 'They are all from this nation.'

Author's comments: There is more than one narration that assigns this meaning to the verse. However, the apparent meaning of the verses of this chapter of the Qur'an suggests that this is a division of all humankind, not only of the Prophet's nation. Perhaps these narrations are intended to explain some of the referents of these verses, although this seems unlikely. The same is true of the tradition that say the People of the Right Hand refers to the companions of the Commander of the Faithful, or that the People of Left Hand are the enemies of the Household of the Prophet.

(16) In *al-Maḥāsin*, al-Barqī narrates via his chain from Muʿāwiya b. Wahb, that he asked Imām al-Ṣādiq about drinking something in a single gulp, to which he replied that this was disliked (*makrūh*) because 'this is the drinking of *hīm*.' Muʿāwiya asked, 'What is *hīm*?' He said: 'A thirsty camel.'

(17) In the same source, al-Barqī narrates via his chain from al-Ḥalabī that Imām al-Ṣādiq said it was disliked that one should resemble a *hīm*. He was asked, 'What is a *ḥīm*?' He said, 'Dry ground.'

Author's comments: Both of these meanings are found in other narrations too.

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Verses 57–96

Now that God Almighty has explained different the fates that await each of the three classes of people—the Foremost, the People of the Right Hand, and the People of the Left Hand—on the Day of Judgement, He provides a detailed account of the condition of the People of the Left Hand (*aṣḥāb al-shimāl*). In the course of this, He explains that what consigned them to this fate was that they broke their pledge of divine servanthood (*'ubūdiyya*) and denied both the Resurrection and the divine recompense for their deeds. God then bids His Prophet to respond to them by affirming the Resurrection and the recompense in general, before telling them about the recompense that awaits them on the Day of Judgement.

God rebukes the idolaters for denying the Resurrection even though the one who is telling them about it is none other than their Creator, who looks after their affairs and has ordained that they should die and then be created anew. Therefore, He knows best what will become of them during the course of their existence and what fate awaits them in the Hereafter. Moreover, the scripture through which their Creator is informing them of all of this is the Qur'an, which is divinely protected from interference or interpolation at the hands of the devils and their human confederates.

After this, the discourse turns back to the condition of the three groups of people and shows that the differences in their states begin from their time of death. With this, God draws the chapter to a close.

نَحْنُ خَلَقْنَاكُمْ فَلَوْلَا تُصَدِّقُونَ ﴿٥٧﴾

(56:57) ***We created you. Then why do you not acknowledge it?***

Note that this statement occurs within the context of a discussion about the Resurrection and the recompensing of deeds, and it is these things that they have denied and rejected. Therefore, the question, '*why do you not acknowledge it?*', admonishes them to believe in the Resurrection and give up their denial of it. The reason they are given for why they should cease denying it is: *We created you*.

Why does the fact that God created them mean that they should believe what He tells them? There are two reasons for this:

First of all, because if God created them once, He can create them again, as per the verse: *Say, 'He will revive them who produced them the first time, and He has knowledge of all creation'* (36:79).

Secondly, because if God is their creator, then He is also the one who looks after their affairs and the one who has endowed them with their qualities as created beings. As a result, He knows best what He will do with them and what will become of them. Therefore, when He informs them that after they die they will be brought back to life and recompensed for their deeds—good and evil—in this world, there is no recourse for them except to believe what He tells them and they have no valid excuse for denying the knowledge about the Resurrection and Final Recompense that He imparts to them through His scripture. For example, see the verses: *Would He who has created not know? And He is the All-attentive, the All-aware* (67:14); *We will bring it back as We began the first creation—a promise upon Us. Indeed, We will do that* (21:104); *... a true promise of Allah, and who is truer in speech than Allah?* (4:122).

Therefore, the meaning of the verse is: 'We created you and We know what We did with you and what We will do with you, so We are informing you that We will resurrect you and recompense you for your actions. So, why will you not believe what We tell you in the scripture We have sent down to you?'

Note that in this verse and those that follow it, there is a shift from speaking about the deniers in the third-person ('they') to addressing them directly in the second-person ('you'), as the verses are intended to be heard as a rebuke and condemnation, and the effect of this is more powerful when spoken directly to its intended recipients.

أَفَرَأَيْتُمْ مَا تُمْنُونَ ﴿٥٨﴾

(56:58) *Have you considered the sperm that you emit* (tumnūn)*?*

The verb *tumnūn* means to emit or discharge semen, meaning into the wombs. Therefore, the meaning is: 'Have you considered the semen that you discharge into womens' wombs?'

أَأَنْتُمْ تَخْلُقُونَهُ أَمْ نَحْنُ الْخَالِقُونَ ﴿٥٩﴾

(56:59) *Is it you who create it, or are We the creator?*

In other words, 'Do you turn it into a human being like yourselves, or do we accomplish this transformation?'

نَحْنُ قَدَّرْنَا بَيْنَكُمُ الْمَوْتَ وَمَا نَحْنُ بِمَسْبُوقِينَ ﴿٦٠﴾

(56:60) ***We have ordained death among you, and We are not to be outmaneuvered***

The governance of the creation and all of its affairs and features goes hand-in-hand with the act of creation, where 'creation' (*khalq*) denotes the outpouring of existence (*ifāḍat al-wujūd*). The limited existence of the human being, from the first moment of his being until the last moment of his worldly life, with all of its features and complexities, is entirely the result of the determination of his Creator, God Almighty. Therefore, death, like the life that comes before it, is also the result of His determination. The human being is not subject to death because of any deficiency on the part of his Creator or because He could not have made him in such a way that he would not die, or because he falls prey to extraneous agents that cause him to die and deprive him of the life his Creator bestowed upon him. After all, this would entail some limitation or flaw in God's power and render Him constrained by the system of cause and effect that He created—in other words, His will would be constrained by His own will, which is obviously impossible, for we know that God's power is absolute and untrammeled by anything else.

From this, it becomes evident that when God says, *We have ordained death among you*, this means that death is truly part of His plan, rather than an unintended but inevitable consequence of the existence of living things. On the contrary, God ordained that the human being should live, and He ordained that this life should be followed by death.

Furthermore, it is clear that when God says, *and We are not to be outmaneuvered*, this means that the fact of death does not mean He is in any way constrained or limited in His power. It is not the case that He bestows life on human beings and intends for them to live forever, but then other external factors snatch this life away and cause human beings to die. On the contrary, death is as much a part of the divine plan as life.

عَلَىٰ أَنْ نُبَدِّلَ أَمْثَالَكُمْ وَنُنْشِئَكُمْ فِي مَا لَا تَعْلَمُونَ ﴿٦١﴾

(56:61) ***in order to*** **('alā an)** ***replace you with your likes*** **(amthāl)** ***and recreate you in that which you do not know.***

The prepositional phrase, '*in order to...*', follows on from the sentence, *We have ordained...* in the previous verse and qualifies it as an adverb. In other

words: 'We have ordained death amongst you in order to replace you with your likes and recreate you in that which you do not know.'

Amthāl is the plural of *mithl*, and when we speak of something's *mithl* (or 'like'), this denotes something that is of the same species. Therefore one human being is the *mithl* of another. Therefore, when God says, *to replace you with your likes*, this means to replace other human beings like you with you or to replace you with other human beings like you. In both cases, this refers to replacing one group of humans with another and putting the subsequent generation in the place of the previous one.

... and recreate you in that which you do not know: The phrase, '*that which you do not know*' refers to 'a creation *which you do not know*.' In other words, 'In order to recreate you and bring you into being in a new creation that you do not know, and this is the existence of the world that is to come, which is utterly different from the transient existence of this world.'

Therefore, the meaning of the last two verses taken together is as follows: 'Death has only been ordained amongst you by Our decree, not because of any deficiency in Our power, because We could not prolong your lives if We wished, or because We have been constrained by some external force that snatched your life away and that we could not protect you from. On the contrary, We ordained death amongst you in order that you be replaced by others like you, so that one people might be replaced by another, and that you might experience a new creation that befits the life that awaits you in the Hereafter that lies beyond this evanescent worldly creation. Therefore, death is nothing more than moving from one abode to another, and replacing one kind of creation with another, it is neither the end of a thing, nor is it a return to nothingness.'

Some have suggested that the word *mithl* should in fact be read as *mathal*, which means 'likeness' in the sense of one's form. This reading would render the meaning: 'We have ordained death amongst you in order to change your form and create you in a guise with which you are as yet unfamiliar or which is as yet still unknown to you. For example, we might resurrect you in the form of a dog, a pig, or some other animal, while in this world you had the appearance of a human being.' However, the interpretation we have given on the basis of it being *mithl* is both more comprehensive and more insightful.

وَلَقَدْ عَلِمْتُمُ النَّشْأَةَ الْأُولَىٰ فَلَوْلَا تَذَكَّرُونَ ﴿٦٢﴾

(56:62) ***Certainly you have known the first genesis, then why do***

you not take admonition?

By *the first genesis*, the Qur'an means the creation of this world. The idolaters are familiar with its features and qualities, and this knowledge means that they should accept the existence of a subsequent and everlasting creation where they will be recompensed for their deeds. After all, when one considers the cosmic order that governs this world, it is evident that it was not created blindly or without purpose. Therefore, this transient worldly existence must have an enduring goal. It is also evident, looking at the order of the cosmos, that everything must be guided to the form of felicity natural to its species. Now, the guidance of human beings necessitates that God sends prophets to them to promulgate religions and deliver moral commands and prohibitions and that He recompense for their good and evil deeds. However, the latter does not take place in this world. Therefore, it must take place somewhere else—and that is in the creation of the Hereafter (see verses 38:27–28).

The idolaters have seen this world first-hand and know it well. They also know that the one who spoke it into existence from the silence of nothingness was God Almighty. Therefore, if He was able to do this the first time, He is able to do it again: *Say, 'He will revive them who produced them the first time'* (36:79). Therefore, this logical demonstration of the possibility of God repeating the act of creation a second time negates their argument that the Resurrection is something improbable or absurd.

In short, the idolaters' knowledge of the first creation supplies them with the premises necessary to construct a logical demonstration of the possibility of the Resurrection. Therefore, they cannot claim that it is something absurd or unlikely, as one cannot dismiss as absurd what is logically possible.

Readers will note that this also suggests a logical argument for the possibility of a physical resurrection. In short, a person's body at their time of resurrection is akin to the body they possessed while this world. Therefore, if it is possible for God to create a human body and endow it with life in this world, it is certainly possible for him to create a human body and endow it with life in the Hereafter, because the two are alike, and when two things are alike in their features, they are also alike in the possibility of their existence.

It is strange, then, to see al-Zamakhsharī argue in *al-Kashshāf* that this verse demonstrates the validity of analogical juristic reasoning (*qiyās*) because the idolaters are condemned for not understanding the creation of the Resurrection by analogy with the creation of this world. This is an error on his part, because the verse is actually providing a logical argument (*qiyās burhānī*

manṭiqī), which yields definitive knowledge, whereas the kind of analogical juristic reasoning he is referring to yields only speculative knowledge (*ẓann*), so there is no relation between the two.

Al-Alūsī writes about this verse in *Rūḥ al-maʿānī*:

> 'Then *why do you not take admonition* that the One able to bring about the first creation is even better able to bring about the second one, for even less effort is required, as the materials and components for it are already present, and there is a previous example to work from. This, therefore, demonstrates the validity of analogical juristic reasoning (*qiyās*), although some have said that it only demonstrates the validity of *a fortiori* analogy (*qiyās bi al-awlā*, that is 'argument from the stronger reason'), as this is the argument used in the verse.'

Comment: Al-Alūsī's argument suffers from the same flaw as al-Zamakhsharī's. Furthermore, the verse does not present any *a fortiori* analogy whatsoever, as the common element between the creation of this world and the creation of the Hereafter is that they are both alike, and the foundation of all logical deduction is that when two things are alike in their features, they are also alike in their possibility or impossibility.

As for al-Alūsī's argument that the creation of the hereafter is even easier than the creation of this world because the required materials and components are already present, this is invalid. After all, these materials and components need God for their continued existence no less than they needed Him to come into existence in the first place. Therefore, the second creation is no different from the first one.

As for his claim that God has a 'previous example' (*sabaq al-mithāl*) to work from, this is a confusion of likeness (*mithl*) and pattern (*mithāl*). The body of the Resurrection is like the body of this world, but it does not share its form or follow its pattern, or else the Resurrection would be no different to this world, in which case it would not be the Resurrection.

Now, if one were to argue: If the body of the Resurrection is like the body of this world, but the likeness of a thing is not the same as it, this would mean that the human being that inhabits this body in the Resurrection is not the same as the human being who inhabited the body in this world, because he is like him but not the same as him.

Reply: We have already discussed on multiple occasions that a person's individuality resides in his spirit, not in his body. It is the spirit that survives death while the body decomposes and crumbles. Therefore, when a new body is made for the Hereafter that is like the one that existed in this world and the

spirit becomes attached to it, this is the same person that existed in this world. This is no different to saying that the old man Zayd is the same person as he was when he was a youth, this is because his spirit has endured—and with it, his individual identity—even while his body has been in a state of constant change from one moment to the next for the duration of his life.

أَفَرَأَيْتُمْ مَا تَحْرُثُونَ ﴿٦٣﴾ أَأَنْتُمْ تَزْرَعُونَهُ أَمْ نَحْنُ الزَّارِعُونَ ﴿٦٤﴾ لَوْ نَشَاءُ لَجَعَلْنَاهُ حُطَامًا فَظَلْتُمْ تَفَكَّهُونَ ﴿٦٥﴾ إِنَّا لَمُغْرَمُونَ ﴿٦٦﴾ بَلْ نَحْنُ مَحْرُومُونَ﴿٦٧﴾

(56:63–67) ***Have you considered what you sow? Is it you who make it grow, or are We the grower? If We wish, We surely turn it into chaff, whereat you are left stunned 'Indeed we have suffered loss! Rather we are deprived!'***

In the previous set of verses, the Qur'an called the idolaters' attention to the way in which they were created and the fact that God had ordained death amongst them as a stepping-stone towards the Resurrection and the divine recompense for their deeds—all of which falls within the purview of God's lordship (*rubūbiyya*). Following on from this, the present verses enumerate three of the most important facts of their worldly lives: First is agriculture, from which they obtain sustenance for themselves; second is water, which they drink; and third is fire, which they use to keep warm and to meet many of their needs. All of this demonstrates God's lordship over them, for lordship is nothing less than the governance of the material realm.

Have you considered what you sow (taḥruthūn)*?*—The verb *taḥruthūn* means to plough the earth and scatter seeds in it—*Is it you who make it grow*—Do you bring forth the plants from the seeds and nurture them until they reach their fullest, where '*it*' refers to the seeds that are sown—*or are We the grower?*—or are We the ones who bring it forth and nurture it until it is ready to harvest?—*If We wish, We surely turn it into chaff*—in other words, We will turn it into broken and desiccated pieces—*whereat you are left stunned*—astonished by what has happened to your crops, speaking to one another about what has happened, saying—*'Indeed we have suffered loss!'*—because your crops have failed, your wealth is lost, your time is squandered, and your efforts are wasted—*'Rather we are deprived!'*—because you will not have provisions or any other benefits from your crops.

There is no contradiction between negating the act of growing these crops from them and ascribing this to God and the role of natural causes play in fostering the growth of the crops, as these causes do play a role but are ultimately dependent upon God in this—they do not exist separately or operate independently of Him. In fact, they are manifestations of His blessings to humankind. The same is true of the causes that lie beyond these causes—the entire chain of cause and effect is dependent upon God, for He is the Lord, the Ultimate.

أَفَرَأَيْتُمُ الْمَاءَ الَّذِى تَشْرَبُونَ ﴿٦٨﴾ أَأَنْتُمْ أَنْزَلْتُمُوهُ مِنَ الْمُزْنِ أَمْ نَحْنُ الْمُنْزِلُونَ ﴿٦٩﴾ لَوْ نَشَاءُ جَعَلْنَاهُ أُجَاجًا فَلَوْلَا تَشْكُرُونَ ﴿٧٠﴾

(56:68–70) ***Have you considered the water that you drink? Is it you who bring it down from the rain cloud, or is it We who bring it down? If We wish We can make it bitter. Then why do you not give thanks?***

Note that these verses single out thanksgiving (*shukr*), which means to remember God and His blessings beautifully by making a show of servanthood in one's words and deeds. The remainder of the meaning of these verses is clear.

أَفَرَأَيْتُمُ النَّارَ الَّتِى تُورُونَ ﴿٧١﴾ أَأَنْتُمْ أَنْشَأْتُمْ شَجَرَتَهَا أَمْ نَحْنُ الْمُنْشِئُونَ﴿٧٢﴾ نَحْنُ جَعَلْنَاهَا تَذْكِرَةً وَمَتَاعًا لِلْمُقْوِينَ ﴿٧٣﴾

(56:71–73) ***Have you considered the fire that you kindle*** **(tūrūn)*****? Was it you who caused its tree to grow, or were We the grower? It was We who made it a reminder and a boon for the desert-dwellers*** **(muqwīn).**

In *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, al-Ṭabrisī writes: '*Īrā'* ('to kindle', from which *tūrūn* is derived) means to light a fire by striking a flint. In Arabic, one says *qadaḥa fa ūrā* ("he struck the flint and kindled a fire") if it lights, or *qadaḥa fa akbā* ("he struck the flint but did not produce a spark") if it does not. *Muqwī* ("desert-dwellers", the singular of *muqwīn*) refers to someone who lives in an empty desert (*qiwā'*) where no one else is to be found. One says *aqwat al-dār* ('the house was deserted') if its inhabitants forsake it.' The meaning of the remainder is clear.

فَسَبِّحْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الْعَظِيمِ ﴿٧٤﴾

(56:74) ***So celebrate the Name of your Lord, the All-supreme***

This command is addressed to the Prophet. Having recounted the signs of His lordship to the idolaters and said that it is He who creates them and governs their affairs, and that part of this governance is that they will be brought back to life and requited for their deeds, even though they continue to obstinately deny this, God turns His attention away from them and towards His Prophet. This is as if to show that the idolaters do not comprehend what is being said, so instead God tells His Prophet to glorify Him and declare Him above their idolatry and denials of the Resurrection and Final Judgement.

Looking in more detail at the command, *So celebrate with the Name* (fa sabbiḥ bi ism), the *fa* ('So') shows that this celebration of God's Name follows from the exposition that has just been given above, while the *bi* ('with') shows that God is to be glorified using His Name. Therefore, the meaning is: 'When this is the reality of the matter, then glorify God using the remembrance of His name!' Alternatively, *the Name* here might refer directly to the remembrance of God, because—as some scholars have pointed out—to pronounce the name of a thing is to remember it. On the other hand, the preposition *bi* might be used to mark the object of the verb, '*celebrate*', in which case it means 'celebrate the Name of your Lord', as to glorify the name of something is to glorify the thing itself.

In any case, the verse means: 'Glorify the name of your Lord and declare Him transcendent above the suggestion of any partner for Him and any denial of the Resurrection and divine recompense that follows it.'

The All-supreme (al-ʿAẓīm) at the end of this verse can be an adjective for either '*the Name*' or '*your Lord*.'

فَلَا أُقْسِمُ بِمَوَاقِعِ النُّجُومِ ﴿٧٥﴾

(56:75) ***So I swear not*** **(fa lā uqsim)** ***by the places where the stars set*** **(mawāqiʿ al-nujūm)*!***

The phrase, '*I swear not*', is actually the formula for an oath (i.e. 'I swear...'). Some have said that the *lā* ('not') is superfluous or that it is a negation and that the oath is the verb *uqsim*.

Mawāqiʿ is the plural of *mawqiʿ*, meaning 'place.' Therefore, the meaning is: 'I swear by the places of the stars in the heavens.' Others have said that *mawāqiʿ* is the plural of the m-infinitive (*maṣdar mīmī*) *mawqiʿ*, which means 'to fall.' Therefore the oath is being sworn by the stars as they fall on the Day

of Resurrection, or by shooting stars as they fall from heaven and strike the devils, or on the places where the stars set on the western horizon. However, the interpretation we have offered here of 'place' is what first comes to mind in this context.

وَإِنَّهُ لَقَسَمٌ لَوْ تَعْلَمُونَ عَظِيمٌ ﴿٧٦﴾

(56:76) ***And indeed it is a great oath, should you know***

This magnifies the importance of the oath and emphasizes it once again.

إِنَّهُ لَقُرْآنٌ كَرِيمٌ ﴿٧٧﴾ فِي كِتَابٍ مَكْنُونٍ ﴿٧٨﴾ لَا يَمَسُّهُ إِلَّا الْمُطَهَّرُونَ ﴿٧٩﴾

(56:77–79) ***This is indeed a noble Qur'an, in a guarded Book, no one touches it except the pure ones***

The idolaters denied God's oneness in lordship and divinity, and they likewise denied the Resurrection and Final Judgement, but they followed this by denying the Qur'an, which was sent down to the Prophet with the teachings of monotheism and the Resurrection. Therefore, they began by denying the fundamental truths of monotheism and the Hereafter, and this led them to deny the Qur'an because it affirmed these truths to them. Hence, God begins by expounding the truths of monotheism and Resurrection by presenting evidence for them from His signs in the cosmos—from the verse, *We created you* ... (56:67), until the verse, ... *a boon for the desert-dwellers* (56:73)—and then He expounds the truth of the Qur'an as His speech, preserved with Him and sent down from Him, and describes it in terms of its most beautiful qualities.

Therefore, when God says, *This is indeed a noble Qur'an*, this is the object of the aforementioned oath, *So I swear not by the places where the stars set* (56:75). Moreover, the fact that He praises the Qur'an for being 'noble' (*karīm*), without qualifying this in any way, shows that this Qur'an is important and dear to Him, praiseworthy in its attributes, and extremely beneficial and useful to humankind, insofar as it contains the fundamental realities that are the key to happiness in this life and in the Hereafter.

And when He says, *in a guarded book*, this is another description of the Qur'an. *Guarded* means that it is protected and kept safe from any change or alteration, and this is a reference to the Guarded Tablet (*al-lawḥ al-maḥfūẓ*), as per the verse, *Rather it is a glorious Qur'an, in a preserved tablet* (85:21–22).

As for, *no one touches* (mass) *it except the purified ones* (muṭahharūn), this is either a description of the *guarded Book*, or a third description of the Qur'an.

The implications of both readings are the same, however.

The meaning is: 'None can touch the guarded book which contains the Qur'an except the purified ones' or 'None can touch the Qur'an which is in the guarded book except the purified ones.'

In any case, this verse is intended to magnify and aggrandize the Qur'an. To 'touch' (*mass*) it means to know it while it is in the guarded book, as per the verse, *We have made it an Arabic Qur'an so that you may apply reason, and indeed it is with Us in the Mother Book, surely sublime and wise* (43:3–4).

'The purified ones' (*al-Muṭahharūn*, which is the passive participle of the verb purify or *taṭhīr*) are those whose souls God has cleansed of the pollution of disobedience and the impurity of sin, or whom He has purified even more fully than this, meaning that He has cleansed their hearts of all attachment to anything besides Him. This is the meaning of purification that best accords with the interpretation of 'touching' as knowledge, rather than purity in the sense of ritual cleanliness and being free from physical pollutants or ritual impurities, as is obvious.

Therefore, *the purified ones* are those whom God has ennobled by purifying their souls, such as the righteous angels and those human beings whom God has cleansed. God says, *Indeed Allah desires to repel all impurity from you, O People of the Household, and purify you with a thorough purification* (33:33). There is no basis for restricting the meaning of *the purified ones* to the angels alone, which is a position espoused by a large number of commentators on the Qur'an, as this is an arbitrary restriction without any evidence to support it.

Perhaps we could read *no one touches it* as a prohibitive injunction (*nahī*), in which case this means that no one may touch the text of the Qur'an save those who are ritually pure and free from both physical pollutants and ritual impurities. *Muṭahharūn* can also be read with a doubled *ṭ*—that is *muṭṭahharūn*—in which case, this is a contraction of *mutaṭahharūn*, which would again render the meaning of the verse a prohibition on touching the Qur'an without being in a state of ritual purity.

It is also possible to read *no one touches it* as a statement of fact that is intended to be understood as a prohibition, because this is a more eloquent and powerful way of conveying such a prohibition.

In *al-Kashshāf*, al-Zamakhsharī writes: 'If the sentence, *no one touches it except the purified ones*, is taken to refer to the Qur'an, then it means that no person should touch its written text without being in a state of ritual purity.' However, the reader will recall that 'touch' (*mass*) can also refer to knowledge or awareness of something. Therefore, this sentence can be a description of

the Qur'an or a description of *the guarded book*.

تَنْزِيلٌ مِنْ رَبِّ الْعَالَمِينَ ﴿٨٠﴾

(56:80) ***gradually sent down*** **(tanzīl)** ***from the Lord of all the worlds***

This is another description of the Qur'an. *Tanzīl* is a verbal noun (*maṣdar*, meaning literally 'a gradual sending down') used here in the sense of a passive participle, meaning: 'Something that has been gradually sent down from God to you so that you all might comprehend and understand it, whereas when it was in the guarded book, only the purified ones could access it.'

The fact that God refers to Himself here as *Lord of all the worlds* is a reference to the fact that God's lordship extends to all of the worlds, of which the human world is one. Therefore, God is their Lord, and if He is their Lord, then they must believe in His scripture, harken to His words, and believe in it without denying it.

أَفَبِهَٰذَا الْحَدِيثِ أَنْتُمْ مُدْهِنُونَ ﴿٨١﴾

(56:81) ***What! Do you take lightly this discourse*** **(mudhinūn)?**

'*This discourse*' refers to the Qur'an.

Idhān (from which *mudhinūn* is derived) means to treat something as unimportant; its original meaning is to soften something with oil (*dahn*), but is used figuratively to mean 'to take lightly' or 'to treat as unimportant.' The question in this verse is rhetorical, with the force of a rebuke. God criticizes them for treating the Qur'an as something unimportant to which they do not need to pay attention.

وَتَجْعَلُونَ رِزْقَكُمْ أَنَّكُمْ تُكَذِّبُونَ ﴿٨٢﴾

(56:82) ***And make your denial of it your provision*** **(rizq)***?*

It is said that the meaning of their *rizq* here is their share of goodness. In other words: 'You make your share of the goodness you are supposed to receive from the Qur'an that you deny it.' In other words, you replace the provision you were supposed to receive with your own denials.

Others have said that *rizq* here refers to the Qur'an, which is God's spiritual provision to them. In other words: 'You have replaced the spiritual provision you have been given with your own denials of it.'

Still others have said that there are implicit components to this sentence, namely: 'Instead of giving thanks for your provision, you deny it.' In other words: 'You have substituted gratitude with denial.'

فَلَوْلَا إِذَا بَلَغَتِ الْحُلْقُومَ ﴿٨٣﴾ وَأَنْتُمْ حِينَئِذٍ تَنْظُرُونَ ﴿٨٤﴾ وَنَحْنُ أَقْرَبُ إِلَيْهِ
مِنْكُمْ وَلَٰكِنْ لَا تُبْصِرُونَ ﴿٨٥﴾ فَلَوْلَا إِنْ كُنْتُمْ غَيْرَ مَدِينِينَ ﴿٨٦﴾
تَرْجِعُونَهَا إِنْ كُنْتُمْ صَادِقِينَ ﴿٨٧﴾

(56:83–87) ***So, why do you not, when it reaches the throat and at that moment you are looking on—and We are nearer to him than you are, though you do not perceive—then why do you not, if you are not subject, restore it, should you be truthful?***

The discourse now returns to its original subject after highlighting their ungrateful denials by saying: 'If you are truthful in your denial of the Resurrection and correct in your rejection of this Qur'an which informs you of the Afterlife, then return the soul of the dying person to him when it is leaving his body through his throat. After all, if death is not part of God's decree, then it is purely a matter of chance, and perhaps you can find some way to repel it. Now, if you cannot return his soul to him and return him to life thereby, then know that death is indeed a reality ordained by God to bring your souls forth for the Resurrection and Final Judgement.'

So, why do you not, when it reaches the throat ...: This follows on from their denial of the Qur'an and its teachings about the Resurrection and divine recompense that follows it. The purpose of the challenge delivered to the idolaters in this section of verses is to call attention to their incapacity and powerlessness. The pronoun '*it*' in *when <u>it</u> reaches the throat* refers to the soul (*nafs*), and the soul reaching the throat is a figure of speech signifying the moment that death fully takes hold of a person as they are drawing their final breath.

... and at that moment you are looking on: Meaning: 'You are looking at the person at the moment of death' or 'as they die in front of you.'

... and We are nearer to him than you are, though you do not perceive: In other words: 'While We are nearer to him than you are because We encompass the totality of his being and Our angelic emissaries who have come to take his spirit away are closer to him than you are, but you do not see Us or Our emissaries.'

Elsewhere, God says: *Allah takes the souls at the time of their death* (39:42); *Say, 'You will be taken away by the angel of death, who has been charged with you ...'* (32:11); *When death approaches anyone of you, Our messengers take him away* (6:61).

When God says, *then why do you not, if you are not subject* (madīnīn)—Note the repetition of the phrase, '*why do you not*' in this verse in order to emphasise the meaning of the previous one. *Madīnīn* ('subject') means 'subject to recompense' (*jazā'*). Therefore, the meaning is: 'If you are not going to be recompensed with reward or punishment at the Resurrection...'

... restore it, should you be truthful? In other words: 'If you are truthful in your claim that there is no Resurrection and no divine recompense awaiting you after death...'—*restore it* is the object of *why do you not* in the previous verses.

Therefore, the meaning of the above verses is: 'If you are truthful in your claim that you will not be recompensed, then why do you not prevent the soul leaving a dying person's body as they are drawing their last breath?'

فَأَمَّا إِنْ كَانَ مِنَ الْمُقَرَّبِينَ ﴿٨٨﴾ فَرَوْحٌ وَرَيْحَانٌ وَجَنَّتُ نَعِيمٍ ﴿٨٩﴾

(56:88–89) ***Then, if he be of those brought near, then ease*** **(rūḥ)**, ***abundance*** **(rayḥān)**, ***and a garden of bliss.***

The discourse now returns to depicting the states of the three groups mentioned at the beginning of this chapter—the Foremost, the People of the Right Hand, and the People of the Left Hand—at their time of death and afterward. As should be clear from the context, the pronoun '*he*' here refers to the dying person. *Those brought near* refers to the Foremost Ones, who are brought near to God, mentioned previously. The word *rūḥ* means 'rest', while *rayḥān* means an abundance of provision. Some have said that it refers to basil, whose scent is the scent of paradise, which the dying person smells as they draw their last breath.

Therefore, the meaning of the verse is: 'If the deceased is one of those brought near, he shall have—as a recompense—relief from every form of grief and pain, provisions from paradise, and a garden of bliss.'

وَأَمَّا إِنْ كَانَ مِنْ أَصْحَابِ الْيَمِينِ ﴿٩٠﴾ فَسَلَامٌ لَكَ مِنْ أَصْحَابِ الْيَمِينِ ﴿٩١﴾

(56:90–91) ***And if he be of the People of the Right Hand, then peace for you*** **(salāmun laka)** ***from the People of the Right Hand!***

It is possible that the preposition 'to' (*la*) in '*Peace to you*' denotes possession, in which case the phrase means: 'You will be singled out for peace from the People of the Right Hand who are your peers and friends, so you will not see anything from them except goodness and peace.'

Some have said that '*peace to you*' has the same meaning as 'peace be upon you' (*salāmun ʿalayka*)—in other words, the People of the Right Hand will send greetings of peace upon you. Scholars have suggested other interpretations besides this as well.

Note that in this pair of verses, there is a shift from speaking about the deceased in the third-person ('he') to addressing him directly ('you'), to show that he will be told, '*Peace for you from the People of the Right Hand!*'

وَأَمَّا إِنْ كَانَ مِنَ الْمُكَذِّبِينَ الضَّالِّينَ ﴿٩٢﴾ فَنُزُلٌ مِنْ حَمِيمٍ ﴿٩٣﴾ وَتَصْلِيَةُ جَحِيمٍ ﴿٩٤﴾

(56:92–94) ***But if he be of the impugners, the astray ones, then a treat of boiling water and entry into hell.***

This means that if the deceased was one of those who denied the truth and went astray, then they will be received with boiling water and the torment of Hellfire.

God describes them as 'impugners, the astray ones' (*mukadhdhibīn ḍāllīn*), placing the fact of their denial before the fact of their going astray, because they are only subject to punishment as a result of their obstinate denial of the truth. If they were merely astray without having obstinately and wilfully rejected the truth, then they would have been classed as 'abased ones' (*mustaḍʿafīn*), and they would not have reached this position.

But what about the earlier verse, *then indeed, you, astray deniers* (56:51), why is it that here their being astray is mentioned before their being deniers? The answer is that this was in response to their statement, '*What! When we are dead and become dust and bones, shall we be resurrected?*' (56:47). Therefore, it was more fitting to describe them as being astray first of all, and then deniers.

إِنَّ هَٰذَا لَهُوَ حَقُّ الْيَقِينِ ﴿٩٥﴾

(56:95) ***Indeed this is certain truth*** **(ḥaqq al–yaqīn)**

Ḥaqq ('truth') signifies knowledge that corresponds to objective reality, while *yaqīn* ('certain') refers to knowledge that contains neither ambiguity

nor doubt. The addition of *ḥaqq* to *yaqīn* in a possessive construct (*iḍāfa*) in the above verse is an expository construct (*iḍāfa bayāniyya*) that emphasizes the meaning of the words.

Therefore, the meaning of this verse is: 'What we have mentioned above about the state of these three groups of people on the Day of Judgement is the truth about which there can be no hesitation and knowledge about which there can be no doubt.'

فَسَبِّحْ بِاسْمِ رَبِّكَ الْعَظِيمِ ﴿٩٦﴾

(56:96) ***So celebrate the Name of your Lord, the All-supreme!***

We have already explained the meaning of this command previously. It follows on from everything said above about the Qur'an and the condition of the three groups of people when they die and when they are Resurrected. Therefore, the meaning of the verse is: 'If the Qur'an has these qualities and is truthful in what it conveys to you about the state of humankind after they die, then exalt your Lord the All-Supreme by invoking His Name, and reject the spurious opinions and arguments of those deniers who have gone astray!'

Examining Narrations

(1) In *Majmaʿ al-Bayān*, about the verse, *Is it you who make it grow, or are We the grower?* (56:64), we read: 'Let none of you say, "I have grown this." Rather, let him say, "I have sown this."'

Author's comments: This is also narrated in *al-Durr al-manthūr* from a number of compilers of *ḥadīth* collections, from Abū Hurayra, from the Prophet.

(2) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, about the verse, *Is it you who bring it down from the rain cloud* (muzun)...? (56:69), he says: '*Muzun* means cloud (*siḥāb*).' *It was We who made it a reminder* (56:73)—'Of the fire that awaits in the Day of Judgement'—*and a boon for the desert-dwellers*—'for the needy.'

(3) In *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, concerning the verse, *So celebrate with the Name of your Lord, the All-supreme* (56:74), al-Ṭabrisī writes: 'And authentic tradition from the Prophet says that when this verse was revealed, he said, "Insert this into your bowing in prayer (*rukūʿ*)."'

Author's comments: This is also narrated by al-Ṣadūq in his *Faqīh*, with an incomplete chain of transmission, and in *al-Durr al-manthūr*, from al-Juhanī, from the Prophet.

(4) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, al-Suyūṭī cites al-Nasā'ī, Ibn Jarīr, Muḥammad b. Naṣr, al-Ḥākim (who also authenticated the tradition), Ibn Mardawayh, and al-Bayhaqī in *Shuʿub al-īmān*, all of whom narrate from Ibn ʿAbbās: 'On the Night of Determination, God sent down the entirety of the Qur'an from the highest of the heavens to the lowest of them, then He separated it in time and in words, sending it down from the lowest of the heavens to the earth in installments (*nujūman*).' Then he recited the verse, *So I swear not by the places where the stars set!* (56:75) (*mawāqiʿ al-nujūm*—where, according to this tradition, *nujūm* is not the plural of *najm* ('star'), but the verbal noun of *najama*, which means 'to pay in installments.')

Author's comments: This renders the meaning of *mawāqiʿ al-nujūm* 'the times when the installments of the Qur'an were sent down.'

(5) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, concerning the verse, *So I swear not by the places where the stars set!*, we read: 'It means: "I swear by the places where the stars set!"'

(6) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, al-Suyūṭī cites Ibn Madawayh, who narrates via a chain going back to Ibn ʿAbbās, from the Prophet: '*This is indeed a noble Qur'an, in a guarded book*—It is with God in purified scrolls—*no one touches it except the purified ones*—meaning those brought near (*al-muqarrabūn*).'

Author's comments: Interpreting *the purified ones* as referring to those brought near (*al-muqarrabūn*) supports what we have said above in our commentary on the verse. And we have cited a tradition from Imām al-Ṣādiq concerning *the guarded book* in our commentary on the verse, *This is Our book, which speaks truly against you* (45:29).

(7) In *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, concerning the verse *no one touches it except the purified ones*, al-Ṭabrisī says: 'They say that it is not permitted for one who is in a major state of ritual impurity (*junub*), a minor state of ritual impurity (*muḥdath*), or one who is menstruating to touch the codex (*muṣḥaf*) of the Qur'an. This is narrated from Muḥammad b. ʿAlī.'

Author's comments: Touching the codex of the Qur'an means to touch its written text, as is evident from other narrations on this topic.

(8) In *al-Kāfī*, al-Kulaynī narrates via a chain of narrators going back to Dāwud b. Farqad, that he asked Imām al-Ṣādiq about hanging an amulet (*taʿwīdh*) on someone who is menstruating. He replied, 'Yes,

there is no problem with that.' He said, 'She may read it and write it, but her hand should not touch it.'

(9) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, al-Suyūṭī cites ʿAbd al-Razzāq, Ibn Abī Dāwud, and Ibn Mundhir, who narrate from ʿAbd Allāh b. Abī Bakr, from his father that the Prophet's letter to ʿAmr b. Ḥazam contained the following: 'And do not touch the Qur'an unless you are in a state of ritual purity.'

Author's comments: There are many traditions on this topic from both Sunnī and Shīʿī sources.

(10) In the same source, Muslim, Ibn Mundhir, and Ibn Mardawayh narrate from Ibn ʿAbbās that during the time of the Messenger of God, the people experienced some rain, and the Prophet said: 'There are some people who are grateful and others who are ungrateful. The grateful say, "This is a mercy God has granted us." The ungrateful say, "This rain is a favour that such and such a setting star bestowed upon us."' Then the verses were revealed, *So I swear not by the places where the stars set … And make your denial of it your provision?* (56:75–82).

Author's comments: Copious traditions have come down via Sunnī sources that these verses were revealed concerning setting stars, which would suggest they were of Medinan provenance. However, this chapter of the Qur'an was revealed in Mecca and, as the reader will note, this interpretation does not fit with the context and tone of the verses.

(11) In *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, al-Ṭabrisī says that ʿAlī and Ibn ʿAbbās's recitation of the verse, *And make your denial of it your provision* (rizqakum)*?* was actually *And make your denial of it your thanks* (shukrakum)*?* And this meaning is also narrated from the Prophet.

Author's comments: This is narrated in *al-Durr al-manthūr*, from the Prophet and ʿAlī.

(12) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, we read: '*If you are not subject* (56:86)—he says, "Meaning if you are not going to be recompensed for your deeds"—*restore it*—"meaning return the spirit to a person's body once it reaches their throat"—*should you be truthful* (56:87).'

(13) In the same source, it is narrated via a chain from Abū Baṣīr: 'I heard Abū ʿAbd Allāh say, "*Then, if he be of those brought near, then ease, abundance*—in the grave—*and a garden of bliss*—in the Hereafter."'

(14) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, al-Suyūṭī cites Qāsim b. Manda in his *al-Aḥwāl wa al-imān bi al-su'āl*, where he narrates from Salmān: 'The Messenger of God said, "The first thing that a believer will be

given glad tidings of when he dies is of ease, abundance, and a garden of bliss. The first thing he will be given glad tidings of in his grave will be that someone will say to him, "I give you good tidings of God's satisfaction (*riḍā*) and paradise, you are most welcome, for God has forgiven the sins of all of those who joined the funeral procession to your grave, and declared truthful those who testified to your righteousness, and answered the supplications of those who pleaded for forgiveness for your sins."'

(15) In the same source, al-Suyūṭī cites Ibn Jarīr and Ibn al-Mundhir, who narrate from Ibn 'Abbās about the verse, *then peace for you from the People of the Right Hand!* (56:91): 'The angels will come with greetings of peace from God, they will invoke peace upon him and inform him that he belongs to the People of the Right Hand.'

Author's comments: This tradition and others like it are based on the assumption that it is the angels are the ones who are speaking in the verse, which would render the meaning: 'The angels say, *peace for you*, because you are *from the People of the Right Hand!*' Therefore, this would both be a greeting of peace and a glad tiding for the believer after his death.

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End of Chapter 56

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Chapter 57

Sūrah al-Hadīd ('The Iron')

بِسۡمِ ٱللَّهِ ٱلرَّحۡمَٰنِ ٱلرَّحِيمِ

In the name of Allah, the most Merciful, the most Compassionate

Verses 1–6

The aim of this chapter of the Qur'an is to motivate and encourage the faithful to spend in the way of God, as illustrated by the repeated exhortations to do so:

Have faith in Allah and His Messenger, and spend out of that wherein He has made you successors ... (57:7)

Who is it that will lend Allah a good loan...? (57:11)

Indeed the charitable men and charitable women, and those who lend Allah a good loan... (57:18)

Note that in these verses, the Qur'an refers to their spending in the way of God as a 'loan' (*qarḍ*) to God. This is because God is the utmost good that can be sought, and He does not break His promises. He has promised them that if they grant Him a loan, He will multiply it for them and grant them a noble and abundant reward.

These verses show that their spending is motivated by Godwariness and faith in the Messenger, and that it occasions forgiveness for their sins, a double share of God's mercy, a light to guide them, and admittance to the truthful ones and the witnesses in the vicinity of God in the Hereafter.

These verses also contain many teachings about creation and resurrection, and they call on their audience to adopt Godwariness, dedication in faith, asceticism, and to take moral admonition.

Based on the tone and context of its verses, this chapter is evidently of Medinan provenance. Some have even claimed that there exists a consensus amongst commentators on the Qur'an about this fact.

The chapter opens by exalting and glorifying God and invoking several of His Most-Beautiful Names. This is because, as we have already men-

tioned, the aim of this chapter is to encourage the faithful to spend in the way of God. Therefore, by praising God in this manner, the opening of the chapter dispels the notion that God is asking the faithful to spend in His way because of any need, lack, or want on His part. We can see a similar dynamic at work in all of the chapters that begin by glorifying God, such as Sūrah al-Ḥashr, al-Ṣaff, al-Jumu'a, al-Taghābun.

سَبَّحَ لِلَّهِ مَا فِي السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۖ وَهُوَ الْعَزِيزُ الْحَكِيمُ ﴿١﴾

(57:1) ***Whatever*** **(mā)** ***there is in the heavens glorifies Allah*** **(sabbaḥ lillāh)** ***and the earth and He is the All-mighty, the All-wise.***

Tasbīḥ ('glorification', from which the verb *sabbaḥ* is derived) means to exalt (*tanzīh*) God above any deficiency, need, or quality that does not accord with His utter perfection. The relative pronoun 'whatever' (*mā*) is used here to denote all rational beings in the heavens and the earth, such as the angels, humankind, and the jinn, as well as all non-rational beings, right down to inanimate entities. This is indicated by the fact that it is only in the following verse that divine attributes specific to rational beings—such as God being the giver of life or having knowledge of the contents of the breasts—are mentioned.

Therefore, the meaning of the verse is: 'Whatever is in the heavens and the earth exalts God—may He be glorified!—and this is the entirety of the cosmos.'

Here, the term *tasbīḥ* is used in its truest and fullest meaning. Readers should not think that it is merely being used in the figurative sense that the existence of every entity in the heavens and the earth attests to God's existence as the Ultimate Origin of all things and that, as the Ultimate Origin of all things, He is utterly without lack and is absolutely perfect in every way. It is also not used in the figurative sense that every existent being declares God's transcendence either explicitly through words (*lisān al-qāl*), as is the case with rational beings, or implicitly through its state of existence (*lisān al-ḥāl*), as is the case with non-rational beings.

How do we know that these figurative interpretations fall short of the meaning of *tasbīḥ* in this verse? Because of the verse elsewhere in the Qur'an that reads, *The seven heavens glorify Him, and the earth, and whoever is in them. There is not a thing but celebrates His praise, but you do not understand their glorification* (17:44). After mentioning the fact that everything in the heavens and the earth glorifies God Almighty in this verse, the Qur'an adds,

but you do not understand their glorification. Now, had the verse been referring to the fact that their existence points to His existence, which would be an argument for God's existence to humankind through their existence, or if what was meant that they praised and glorified God through their state of being, both of these are things that people do understand, which would render the addendum, *but you do not understand their glorification*, meaningless.

Therefore, the fullest meaning of everything in the heavens and the earth performing *tasbīḥ* of God and exalting Him is in speech, even if we do not comprehend it. See the verse, *They will say, 'We were given speech by Allah, who gave speech to all things...'* (41:21)

... and He is the All-mighty, the All-wise—In other words, He overpowers all and cannot be overpowered, His actions are done perfectly such that nothing can undo them and none can object to them.

لَهُ مُلْكُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۖ يُحْيِي وَيُمِيتُ ۖ وَهُوَ عَلَىٰ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ قَدِيرٌ ﴿٢﴾

(57:2) *To Him belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth: He gives life and brings death, and He has power over all things.*

This statement indicates exclusivity; He is the sole sovereign in the heavens and the earth and rules them as He pleases because He is the originator of everything, and whatever is in the heavens and the earth subsists through His existence and its effects. Therefore, there is no rule except His, no sovereignty except His, and no authority except His.

He gives life and brings death refers to the divine names *al-Muḥyī* ('The Giver of Life') and *al-Mumīt* ('The Bringer of Death'). *He gives life and brings death* is general, meaning that it encompasses all life and all death, such as making the angels living beings whose life is not preceded by death, or giving life to the fetus in its mother's womb, and reviving the dead for the Resurrection. It also includes His making inanimate entities dead beings whose death is not preceded by life, causing the human being to die in this world, then causing him to die again in the Isthmus (*Barzakh*), which is what He refers to in the verse, *They will say, 'Our Lord! Twice did You make us die, and twice did You give us life...'* (40:11). Moreover, *He gives life and brings death*, also signifies that He is continuously doing both of these.

... and He has power over all things: This calls attention to the divine attribute of power (*qudra*) and that God's power is limitless and unconstrained by anything. The fact the verse's coda references God's power over

all things, after having already highlighted His power over life and death, is because someone might imagine that God does not have the power to bring back a person who has died and of whom no trace remains.

هُوَ الْأَوَّلُ وَالْآخِرُ وَالظَّاهِرُ وَالْبَاطِنُ ۖ وَهُوَ بِكُلِّ شَيْءٍ عَلِيمٌ ﴿٣﴾

(57:3) ***He is the First and the Last, the Manifest and the Hidden, and He has knowledge of all things.***

Insofar as God has power over all things, this means that His power encompasses all things from all angles. Therefore, whatever one supposes is first, He is before it. Therefore, He is the First before all things. And whatever one supposes is last, He is after it, because His power encompasses all things from all angles. Therefore, He is the Last after all things. Whatever one supposes is manifest, He is more manifest than it, because His power encompasses it from above, so He is the Most Manifest above all things. And whatever one supposes is hidden, He is more hidden than it, because His power encompasses it from behind it. Therefore He is the Most Hidden beyond all things. Hence, He is the First, the Last, the Manifest, and the Hidden, in absolute terms: Whatever else possesses these attributes, these are only relative.

Now, His being first, last, manifest, and hidden, are neither temporal nor spatial in the sense of these attributes being contained in time or space, as this would imply that He was neither prior to them or above them in His existence. On the contrary, He is the One that contains all things in every way and from every angle conceivable.

From the above, it is clear that these four divine names—the First, the Last, the Manifest, and the Hidden—are all subordinate to His name, the All encompassing (*al-Muḥīṭ*), which is itself subordinate to His omnipotence. Therefore, His power encompasses all things. These four names can also be understood as subordinate to the fact that His existence encompasses all things. He subsists before the origination of all things, and after the annihilation of all things. He is nearer to all things than everything that is manifest, and further beyond the comprehension of minds and imaginations than everything else that is hidden.

These four names are also subordinate to His all encompassing knowledge, which befits the coda of this verse, *and He has knowledge of all things*.

Some scholars have explained these four divine names as signifying that He is the First before all things, the Last after the annihilation of all things, the Manifest through proofs that point to Him, and the Hidden who cannot

be apprehended by senses.

Others have said that it means He is the First before everything with no beginning; the Last after everything with no end; the Manifest, the All-triumphant, the Exalted above all things, such that everything is beneath Him; and the Hidden who has knowledge of all things, such that nothing knows more than Him.

Others still have said that it means He is the First without beginning, the Last without end, the Manifest without physical nearness, and the Hidden without physical concealment.

There are other interpretations of these names with similar meanings, which we have omitted for the sake of brevity and due to their lack of value.

هُوَ الَّذِى خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ فِى سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ ثُمَّ اسْتَوَىٰ عَلَى الْعَرْشِ ۚ يَعْلَمُ مَا يَلِجُ فِى الْأَرْضِ وَمَا يَخْرُجُ مِنْهَا وَمَا يَنْزِلُ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ وَمَا يَعْرُجُ فِيهَا ۖ وَهُوَ مَعَكُمْ أَيْنَ مَا كُنْتُمْ ۚ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ بَصِيرٌ ﴿٤﴾

(57:4) ***It is He who created the heavens and the earth in six days; then settled on the Throne. He knows whatever enters the earth and whatever emerges from it and whatever descends from the sky and whatever ascends to it, and He is with you wherever you may be, and Allah sees best what you do.***

We have already discussed the significance of the Divine Throne in our commentary on Sūrah al-Aʿrāf (7:54), where we said that His settling on the Throne is a metaphor for Him exercising governance over His dominion. That is why this is followed by mention of His knowledge of the particulars and condition of everything in creation, because knowledge is a corollary of His divine governance.

He knows whatever enters **(yaliju)** ***the earth and whatever emerges from it and whatever descends from the sky and whatever ascends*** **(yaʿruju)** ***to it:*** According to al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, *wulūj* (from whence the verb *yaliju* is derived) means to enter a narrow opening, while *ʿurūj* (the origin of the verb *yaʿruju*) means to go upwards. Hence, the meaning of the passage is: 'God knows whatever penetrates the earth, such as rainwater, seeds, and the like; and He knows what emerges from it, such as various kinds of plants and animals and springs of water; He knows what comes down from the sky, such as water, sunlight, and angels; and He knows what ascends into

it, such as vapors, angels, and the deeds of servants.

And He is with you wherever you may be ...: He encompasses you fully, so you are never absent from Him, no matter where you go, no matter at what time you lived, and no matter what state you are in. The verse invokes the idea of place by saying '*wherever you may be*' not to restrict the meaning of the verse to spatial locality alone, but because the most common way in which one thing becomes separate or absent from another or seeks to be close to another is through moving one from place to another. However, God's relations to different times, places, and states of being are all equal to Him. Therefore, the verse applies to all of these and more.

Some have said that '*He is with you*' means: 'His knowledge encompasses you.'

... and Allah sees best what you do: This is almost like a conclusion drawn from the previous statements: *He is with you wherever you may be* and He has knowledge of all things, therefore, He *sees best what you do*. This is because He is always present with them, and they are never separated or hidden from Him, and because He is all-knowing, so He perceives not only the outward form of their deeds, but also perceives their internal states, such as the intentions and goals that lay behind their deeds.

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لَهُ مُلْكُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۚ وَإِلَى اللَّهِ تُرْجَعُ الْأُمُورُ ۝٥

(57:5) ***To Him belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth, and to Allah all matters are returned.***

The phrase, *To Him belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth* is repeated here (after already appearing in 57:2, above) to show that all things return to God because they ultimately belong to Him, while the first instance was to show that all things belong to Him because they originate with Him. Elsewhere, God says, *The day when they will emerge from their graves, nothing about them will be hidden from Allah. 'To whom does the sovereignty belong today?' 'To Allah, the One, the All-paramount!'* (40:16).

... and to Allah all matters* (al–umūr) *are returned: Note that *al-umūr* (lit. 'the matters') is a plural noun with the definite article (*al-*). This signifies its absolute generality (that is, *all the matters*). This is akin to the verse, *Look! To Allah do all matters return!* (42:53). This shows that there is nothing in existence save that it will return to God, and nothing returns to Him for any other reason than the fact that He alone has sovereignty over it. Therefore, all command and all authority belong to Him.

Note also that, in this verse, instead of saying 'to Him all matters are returned', the Qur'an says *to Allah all matters are returned*. We see the same in the previous verse, where instead of 'and He sees best what you do', the Qur'an says, *and Allah sees best what you do*. Perhaps this is because it gives these statements a more profound effect on the heart of the listener, and this device is repeated in the later verses in this chapter that discuss the Day of Resurrection and the great rewards that lie in store for those who spend in the way of God.

يُولِجُ اللَّيْلَ فِي النَّهَارِ وَيُولِجُ النَّهَارَ فِي اللَّيْلِ ۚ وَهُوَ عَلِيمٌ بِذَاتِ الصُّدُورِ ﴿٦﴾

(57:6) *He makes the night pass into the day and makes the day pass into the night, and He knows best what is in the breasts.*

When God says that *He makes the night pass into the day and makes the day pass into the night*, this means that He causes their relative lengths to change throughout the year with the changing of the seasons, with one growing longer in the northern hemisphere and growing shorter in the southern hemisphere at the same time. He has called attention to this phenomenon more than once in the Qur'an.

The phrase *what is in the breasts* means the thoughts and intentions that people keep to themselves and hide away in their breasts. This also extends to people's hearts, as the heart is also in the breast. The sentence, *and He knows best what is in the breasts* expounds the fact that His knowledge encompasses even the most hidden parts of their hearts, just as the previous verse had indicated that His sight encompasses the outward appearance of their deeds with the phrase, *and Allah sees best what you do* (57:4).

Examining Narrations

(1) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, al-Suyūṭī cites Aḥmad b. Ḥanbal, Abū Dāwud, al-Tirmidhī (who grades the tradition as 'good' or *ḥasan*), al-Nasā'ī, Ibn Mardawayh, and al-Bayhaqī in *Shu'ub al-īmān*, all of whom narrate from 'Irbāḍ b. Sāriya that the Messenger of God would recite the chapters of the Qur'an that begin with God's glorification (or *tasbīḥ*) before he lay down to sleep. He used to say, 'They contain a verse that is better than a thousand verses.'

Author's comments: This is also narrated by Ibn al-Ḍurays from Yahya b. Abī Kathīr, from the Prophet.

(2) In *al-Kāfī*, al-Kulaynī narrates via his chain of narrators from 'Āsim

b. Ḥamīd: 'I asked 'Alī b. al-Ḥusayn about divine unity (*tawḥīd*). He said, "Surely God Almighty knew that in the End Times there would be people who delve deeply into matters, so He sent down the verse, *Say: God is One*, and the verses from the beginning of Sūrah al-Ḥadīd until the verse, ... *and He knows best what is in the breasts*. And whoever delves into divine unity beyond these verses will surely have perished."'

(3) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, we read: '*Whatever there is in the heavens glorifies Allah and the earth and He is the All-mighty, the All-wise*—this is the Prophet's saying, "I have been given comprehensive speech" (*jawāmi' al-kalām*)—*He is the First*—before everything—and the Last—He subsists after everything—*and He knows best what is in the breasts*—in peoples' minds.'

(4) In *al-Kāfī*, al-Kulaynī narrates that 'Alī was asked, 'Where was our Lord before He created the heavens and the earth?' To which he replied: 'How can one ask about place, when God existed before there was any place!'

(5) In *al-Tawḥīd*, Shaykh al-Ṣadūq narrates a sermon from Imām al-Ḥasan b. 'Alī, in which he says: 'Praise belongs to God, for whom there is no "first" to be known, no "end" to limit, no "before" to apprehend, and no "after" to constrain. His description is not ascertained by minds or their estimations, nor thoughts and their derivations, nor intellects and their reflections, such that you can say of Him: "When?" for He did not begin from anything, nor "Upon what?" for He is not above anything, nor "In what?" for He is not contained by anything.'

Author's comments: When he says 'there is no "first" to be known', this means that He has no beginning, as if He had a beginning, one could know this. Nor does He have an end, as this would limit Him. Nor does He have a before, as then it would be possible to apprehend this. Nor does He have an after, as this would constrain Him.

Equally, when he says 'He did not begin from anything' means that nothing originated Him, so there is no "first" for Him. Equally, He is not above anything in the sense of resting upon it like one body upon another, nor is He contained within something and hidden by it.

(6) In *Nahj al-balāgha*, Imām 'Alī is quoted as saying: 'Every apparent thing (*ẓāhir*) besides Him is not hidden (*ghayr bāṭin*), and every hidden thing (*bāṭin*) besides Him is not apparent (*ghayr ẓāhir*).'

Author's comments: This means that the quality of being apparent in beings other than God cannot co-exist with the quality of being hidden, and vice versa. However, in the case of God, because He is absolutely one (*aḥad*) in His essence (*dhāt*), such that it cannot be divided or split into different parts or aspects, He is apparent while being hidden, and He is hidden while being apparent. Therefore, He is the most hidden of things while in being the most apparent of them, and the most apparent of things in being the most hidden of them.

(7) In the same source, we read: 'Praise belongs to God, the First with nothing before Him and the Last with nothing after Him, the Apparent with nothing above Him, and the Hidden with nothing below Him.'

Author's comments: The meaning of 'before' and 'after' here is not in the temporal sense of the words. We should not imagine an infinite span of time stretching into eternity in both past and future directions, where the existence of the cosmos occupies a finite stretch in the middle while God's existence extends throughout this infinite span of time, including the stretches of time on either side of the cosmos's existence, without any part of time being empty of Him. This is incorrect, however, because it means that God only precedes the cosmos's existence in time, which would mean He exists within time and, as such, His essence would be subject to change and alteration with the passage of time, as His being "before" or "after" would be dependent on time. Therefore, in this conceptualization, it would be time (not God) that is the First and the Last, as time would contain Him.

Equally, being Apparent and Hidden should not be understood in reference to spatiality in the same way (insofar as the term *ẓāhir* signifies one thing being "above" another and *bāṭin* signifies it being "under" or "within" another). God's very essence is transcendent above all things, it precedes all things and subsists after all things, it is beyond all things—beyond everything we can possibly conceptualise—and both time and space are creations of God, not containers of Him.

(8) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, Abū al-Shaykh in *al-ʿAẓama* narrates from Ibn ʿUmar and Abū Saʿīd, from the Prophet: 'People will not stop asking about things until they say, "This God who was before everything—what was before Him?" If they say this to you, tell them: "He is the First before everything and the Last, so there is nothing after Him. He is the Apparent above all things, and the Hidden beneath all things, and He has knowledge of all things."'

(9) In *al-Tawḥīd*, Shaykh al-Ṣadūq narrates via his chain going back to Abū Baṣīr: 'I heard Abū 'Abd Allāh (al-Ṣādiq) say: "God was always our Lord and knowledge was part of His essence even when there was nothing else to know. It was when He brought things into being that His knowledge fell upon objects of knowledge."'

Author's comments: The meaning of knowledge (*'ilm*) in this tradition is not like the mental image that we hold in our minds. It is not the case that God is like a builder who visualizes the image of a house and its shape before he starts construction, then constructs a house according to the image in his mind, such that the resulting physical structure corresponds to the mental image, and even if the house collapses, the mental image of it remains. This kind of knowledge is known as 'general knowledge' (*al-'ilm al-kullī*), which cannot be ascribed to God Almighty. On the contrary, God's essence is the knowledge of the object of knowledge, and when the object of knowledge enters objective reality, the essence of this object of knowledge is identical with God's knowledge of it. The first kind of divine knowledge is known as 'knowledge at the level of the divine essence' (*al-'ilm al-dhātī*), while the latter kind is known as 'knowledge at the level of the divine acts' (*al-'ilm al-fi'lī*).

(10) In the same source, there is a sermon of Imām 'Alī, in which he says: 'He knew it without any intermediary, His knowledge was only with it, and there is no knowledge other than Him between Him and between the object of knowledge.'

Author's comments: This means that God's essence is identical with His knowledge, and there is no additional image or form needed for Him to know anything.

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Verses 7–15

Here, God emphasizes the command to spend in His way, especially for the sake of *jihād*, as illustrated by the verse, *Not equal are those of you who spent and fought before the victory* (57:10). It is further supported by the view that the verse, *Have faith in Allah and His Messenger, and spend...* (57:7), was revealed on the eve of the Battle of Tābūk.

آمِنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرَسُولِهِ وَأَنْفِقُوا مِمَّا جَعَلَكُمْ مُسْتَخْلَفِينَ فِيهِ ۖ فَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنْكُمْ وَأَنْفَقُوا لَهُمْ أَجْرٌ كَبِيرٌ ﴿٧﴾

(57:7) *Have faith in Allah and His Messenger, and spend out of that wherein He has made you successors. Those of you who have faith and spend (in Allah's way)—there is a great reward for them.*

Based on the context of the verse, it appears that it is addressed to those who believe in God and His Messenger and not to the disbelievers or to the believers and disbelievers together, which is the opinion of some commentators. But, if this is the case, then why does God command the believers to have faith in God and the Messenger? When God commands the faithful to have faith this means to confirm their faith through action, as when a particular moral attribute—such as generosity, chastity, or bravery—is fixed in the soul of the human being, this is shown by the fact that its effects are visible in the person's behavior. One of the effects of belief in God and His Messenger is obedience to the commands of God and His Messenger.

From this, it becomes clear, first of all, that when God commands the believers to have faith, He is exhorting those who have achieved a particular level of faith or belief (*īmān*) to pursue an even higher level of it. And this variety of command suggests that whatever the recipient of the command has already attained of the thing he has been commanded to pursue is not yet fully satisfactory to the one issuing the command.

Second, that when God says, *Have faith in Allah and His Messenger, and spend ...*, the fact that the command to spend in the way of God follows the command to have faith in God and His Messenger shows that spending

in the way of God is the practical effect of having this faith. Therefore, the cause of spending in the way of God is a person's faith in God and the Messenger. Conversely, if they do not spend in the way of God, this suggests they are lacking in faith.

***... and spend out of that wherein He has made you successors* (mustakhlafīn):** To be made a successor (*khalīfa*) here could mean that God has made them His successors or vicegerents upon the earth, as per the verse, *Indeed I am going to set a vicegerent* (khalīfa) *on the earth* (2:30). The Qur'an refers to their wealth and worldly possessions in this way in order to expound the reality that what they have is from God and to encourage them to spend it for the sake of God. After all, if they are certain that wealth belongs to God and they are His vicegerents whom He has entrusted with its management, then they know that they should use it in the way He has permitted them. Therefore, it is easy for them to spend it and they are not grieved by this.

On the other hand, it could also mean that they are successors in the sense of inheriting it from those generations who came before them, just as each generation inherits from the one who came before it. This expression also encourages them to spend for the sake of God because, when they recall that this wealth once belonged to someone else but did not remain with them forever, they will realize that it will not be theirs forever either, as they will one day leave it behind for others to inherit. Therefore, it will be easier for them to part with this wealth and their souls will not be troubled by this.

Those of you who have faith and spend (in Allah's way)—there is a great reward for them: Promising them a reward for spending in the way of God provides more force to the encouragement they are being given, and the meaning of faith here is faith in God and His Messenger.

وَمَا لَكُمْ لَا تُؤْمِنُونَ بِاللَّهِ ۙ وَالرَّسُولُ يَدْعُوكُمْ لِتُؤْمِنُوا بِرَبِّكُمْ وَقَدْ أَخَذَ مِيثَاقَكُمْ إِنْ كُنْتُمْ مُؤْمِنِينَ ﴿٨﴾

(57:8) ***Why should you not have faith in Allah while the Messenger invites you to have faith in your Lord, and He has certainly made a covenant with you, should you be faithful?***

Once again, the meaning of 'faith' here is the kind of faith that produces external effects that are visible in a person's behavior, such as spending in the way of God. Or, to put it another way, to their faith being made visible in practice.

... while the Messenger invites you to have faith in your Lord: God is described as their Lord here to suggest the reason why they are being called to believe in God and obey His commands, as if to say: 'While the Messenger invites you to have faith in God because He is your Lord and it is an obligation to believe in Him.'

... and He has certainly made a covenant with you, should you be faithful: This emphasizes the criticism implicit at the beginning of the verse. The pronoun 'he' in *He has certainly made a covenant with you* refers to either God or the Messenger. In either case, this covenant (*mīthāq*) taken from them refers to their bearing witness to God's oneness and the veracity of His Messenger the day they believed in him, as if they accept these beliefs, then they are obliged to hear and obey God and the Messenger.

Some have said that the covenant mentioned in this verse refers, in fact, to the covenant taken from humankind in the World of Particles[1] (*'ālam al-dharr*) before they entered this world. In this case, the pronoun 'he' in *He has certainly made* can only refer to God. However, the problem with this reading of the verse is that it does not fit with the context of the argument being made to the audience, both because they are unaware of this covenant they made before this worldly life began and because this covenant was taken from all humankind, including the disbelievers and the hypocrites, and not only the faithful.

هُوَ الَّذِي يُنَزِّلُ عَلَىٰ عَبْدِهِ آيَاتٍ بَيِّنَاتٍ لِيُخْرِجَكُمْ مِنَ الظُّلُمَاتِ إِلَى النُّورِ ۚ وَإِنَّ اللَّهَ بِكُمْ لَرَءُوفٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿٩﴾

(57:9) ***It is He who sends down manifest signs to His servant that He may bring you out of darkness into light, and indeed Allah is most kind and merciful to you.***

The phrase 'manifest signs' (*āyāt bayyināt*) refers to the verses (*āyāt*) of the Qur'an, which make clear to them the nature of their religious obligations. The pronoun 'he' in *that He may bring you out of darkness into light* can refer to either God or to His Messenger, although both ultimately have the same significance. After all, the covenant is with God, and He took it from them either through the mediation of His Messenger or without His

1 This is the literal translation of *'ālam al-dharr*. A better translation is 'The World of Pre-existence' (Pub.)

mediation. Equally, to believe in the Messenger of God is to believe in God, and that is why the previous verse begins by saying *Why should you not have faith in Allah*, mentioning Himself but not His Messenger, to show that having faith in the Messenger is tantamount to having faith in Him.

... and indeed Allah is most kind and merciful to you: The fact that the coda of this verse highlights God's kindness and mercy indicates that the faith to which God's Messenger calls them to is good and beneficial for them. After all, they are the ones who benefit from their faith, not God and the Messenger. Therefore, this has the effect of accentuating the encouragement to have faith in God and spend in His way.

وَمَا لَكُمْ أَلَّا تُنْفِقُوا فِي سَبِيلِ اللَّهِ وَلِلَّهِ مِيرَاثُ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضِ ۚ لَا يَسْتَوِي مِنْكُمْ مَنْ أَنْفَقَ مِنْ قَبْلِ الْفَتْحِ وَقَاتَلَ ۚ أُولَٰئِكَ أَعْظَمُ دَرَجَةً مِنَ الَّذِينَ أَنْفَقُوا مِنْ بَعْدُ وَقَاتَلُوا ۚ وَكُلًّا وَعَدَ اللَّهُ الْحُسْنَىٰ ۚ وَاللَّهُ بِمَا تَعْمَلُونَ خَبِيرٌ ﴿١٠﴾

(57:10) ***Why should you not spend in the way of Allah, while to Allah belongs the heritage* (mīrāth) *of the heavens and the earth? Not equal are those of you who spent and fought before the victory. They are greater in rank than those who have spent and fought afterwards. Yet Allah has promised the best reward to each and Allah is well aware of what you do.***

The term *mīrāth* ('heritage') denotes the wealth that is left by a deceased person for their surviving heirs. The verse describes this heritage as being *of the heavens and the earth* to show that it encompasses all the things that they contain that are made from them and owned by intelligent creatures, such as their homes. This is because the heavens and the earth encompass all that they contain, and all that they contain has been created from them. Intelligent creatures, such as human beings, for instance, make use of these things and specify that certain things are only to be used by themselves. This is the construct of ownership (*mulk*), which God guided them to use in their social lives in order to organise various aspects of their worldly existence.

However, neither do human beings endure indefinitely, nor does their ownership of things endure. Rather, the death that has been ordained amongst them takes them away, and whatever they possess is left for those who come after them. And this will continue until everyone has perished

and only God remains.

Therefore, the earth and all the inherited wealth that it contains—insofar as each generation of its inhabitants inherits this wealth from the generation that came before them—is a perpetual heritage that flows between them, from one generation to the next. It is also a heritage in the sense that they will all one day pass away and only God will remain—the God who made them successors of one another upon the earth.

The heritage of the heavens and the earth belong to God in both of these senses. In the first sense, this is because He is the one who endowed them with the ownership of things, but He is the ultimate owner of all things, as per the verses: *To Allah belongs whatever is in the heavens and the earth* ... (31:26); *To Allah belongs the kingdom of the heavens and the earth* ... (24:42); ... *and give them out of the wealth of Allah which He has given you* (24:33).

As for the second sense, this is evident from the verses about the End of The World, for instance, *Everyone on it is ephemeral* (55:26), and others like it.

The most appropriate meaning for 'heritage' in the present verse would appear to be the second of the two.

In any case, the verse contains a strong rebuke of them for not spending in the way of God out of their wealth, when the true inheritor of this wealth is only God, as it will neither remain for them nor for anyone else. The repetition of God's name instead of using a pronoun in the verse, *Why should you not spend in the way of Allah, while to Allah belongs* is to intensify the rebuke.

Not equal are those of you who spent and fought before the victory—to those who spent and fought afterwards. *They are greater in rank than those who have spent and fought afterwards.*

According to some commentators, in this passage, 'the victory' (*al-fatḥ*) refers to the conquest of Mecca or the victory at Ḥudaybiyya. The fact that the verse links fighting to spending suggests, or rather slows, that the meaning of spending in the way of God (*al-infāq fī sabīl Allāh*) here is spending for the sake of *jihād*.

This verse occurs in the context of explaining that the quicker someone spends in the way of God, the dearer this is to God, and the greater the station and rank of the one who spends with God. Were it not for this context, the verse suggests that there was a victorious battle and two groups of people: Some who had hastened to spend in the way of God before and some who had begun to spend in the way of God after it.

Yet Allah has promised the best reward to each: In other words, God

has promised the best reward to them, whether they spent and fought in the way of God before the victory or spent and fought in the way of God after it, even if the first group are greater and more exalted in rank than the latter. This verse is meant to reassure the hearts of those who were late to spend and fight in the way of God that they shall receive His mercy and that they will not be deprived of reward altogether. Therefore, there is no reason for them to despair, even if they were late to spend and fight compared to others.

... and Allah is well aware of what you do: This coda relates to the entirety of the verse. Hence, it strengthens the rebuke at the beginning of the verse, confirms that *not equal are those of you who spent and fought before the victory* and that *Allah has promised the best reward to each*. It may also relate only to the last sentence of the verse, but it is a more complete and thorough reading to see that it relates to the whole of it.

مَنْ ذَا الَّذِى يُقْرِضُ اللَّهَ قَرْضًا حَسَنًا فَيُضَاعِفَهُ لَهُ وَلَهُ أَجْرٌ كَرِيمٌ ﴿١١﴾

(57:11) ***Who is it that will lend Allah a good loan*** **(qarḍ)*****, that He may multiply*** **(yuḍāʿif)** ***it for him and there may be a noble reward*** **(ajr)** ***for him?***

According to al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, 'whatever wealth is given to a person on condition that it be returned is called a *qarḍ*.' In *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, al-Ṭabrisī says, 'Its original meaning is "to detach", as the owner willingly detaches a portion of his own wealth and gives it to another with the stipulation that it must be returned. *Yuḍāʿif* means to increase something by the like two or severalfold.' Al-Rāghib says, 'The terms *ajr* and *ujra* refer to an action's reward, whether in this world or the Hereafter... however they are only used to denote something beneficial and never something harmful, unlike "recompense" (*jazā'*), which can be both beneficial and harmful.'

Whatever God gives as a reward for the actions of His servants is a grace and a favour (*tafaḍḍul*) given by Him to the servant without the servant having earned it. After all, both the servant and whatever actions emanate from him are completely and irrevocably the rightful property of God, even if these acts and their moral worth are considered the property of the servant according to religion. The fact that the human being has been endowed with the power to act is an additional favour from God, as his ability to choose to act as he wishes. In addition to this, God has promised a reward to the human being for his deeds and called this a reward and a recompense. The only beneficiary of all of this is none other than the servant himself. God says:

for those of them who have been virtuous and Godwary there shall be a great reward (3:172); *As for those who have faith and do righteous deeds, there will be an everlasting reward for them* (41:8).

And after describing paradise and its blessings, He says: *This is indeed your recompense, and your endeavour has been well-appreciated* (76:22).

Consider also the fact that God has promised gratitude (*shukr*) to the faithful and said that He will not lord these blessings over them (*mann*)—this is the perfection of grace and favour.

This verse, therefore, contains a powerful exhortation to the audience to spend in the way of God, for it opens with a question about those of them who spend in the way of God. It compares their spending to a loan that they are lending to God, which He must one day repay. It then makes clear that He will not merely repay like with like, but will rather repay the capital many times over. As if this was not enough, it will say that, in addition to repaying the loan, God will give them a noble reward in the Hereafter. A 'noble reward' (*ajr karīm*) means a reward that the recipient will be undoubtedly pleased with. The reward of the Hereafter is the same, so it will be the highest blessing conceivable at the time of the servant's greatest conceivable need.

يَوْمَ تَرَى الْمُؤْمِنِينَ وَالْمُؤْمِنَاتِ يَسْعَىٰ نُورُهُمْ بَيْنَ أَيْدِيهِمْ وَبِأَيْمَانِهِمْ
بُشْرَاكُمُ الْيَوْمَ جَنَّاتٌ تَجْرِي مِنْ تَحْتِهَا الْأَنْهَارُ خَالِدِينَ فِيهَا ۚ ذَٰلِكَ هُوَ
الْفَوْزُ الْعَظِيمُ ﴿١٢﴾

(57:12) ***The day you will see the faithful, men and women, with their light moving swiftly before them and on their right, 'There is good news for you today! Gardens with streams running in them, to remain in them. That is the great success.'***

The phrase, '*The day...*' is an adverbial qualified for '*a noble reward.*' In other words, '*there may be a noble reward for him* on *the day you will see the faithful...*', and this day is, of course, the Day of Judgement. The pronoun 'you' in the phrase, '*you will see the faithful*', is addressed either to the Prophet or to every listener who is worthy of being addressed.

Therefore, the meaning is: 'Whoever grants God a good loan shall have a noble reward on the day you—O Prophet! *Or* whoever is fit to perceive—will see those men and women who have faith in God and His Messenger with their light moving swiftly in front of them and on their right sides.'

And the right side is the one associated with felicity and auspiciousness.

This verse is general in its meaning and encompasses the faithful of all prophetic nations, and not only the nation of the Prophet. The fact that it uses the phrase, *moving swiftly*, to describe the illumination of their lights shows that they are hastening to the highest levels of paradise that God have prepared for them, and all aspects of felicity and levels of nearness to God will be illuminated for them one after another until their light is completed fully, per the verses: *Those who are wary of their Lord will be led to paradise in throngs* (39:73); *The day We shall gather the Godwary toward the All-beneficent in droves* (19:85); *... on the day when Allah will not let the Prophet down and the faithful who are with him. Their light will move swiftly before them and on their right. They will say, 'Our Lord! Perfect our light for us ...* (66:8).

Commentators have differed about the meaning of some of the vocabulary in the verse, which we have omitted here because there is no evidence for these meanings in the verse itself. However, we will turn to them in our discussion of the traditions, below.

There is good news for you today! Gardens with streams running in them, to remain in them: This is what will be spoken to the believing men and women on the Day of Resurrection by the angels at God's command. In other words, 'They will be told, *There is good news for you today!*' And this good news is nothing other than paradise. The remainder of the verse's meaning is clear.

That is the great success: This can either be read as the speech of God, or the speech of the angels. In the first instance, the relative pronoun, 'that', refers to what has already been said in the verse about the light moving swiftly before them and on their right, and the good news they will be given. If it is the speech of the angels, then it refers to the gardens of paradise and remaining in them forever.

يَوْمَ يَقُولُ الْمُنَافِقُونَ وَالْمُنَافِقَاتُ لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا انْظُرُونَا نَقْتَبِسْ مِنْ
نُورِكُمْ قِيلَ ارْجِعُوا وَرَاءَكُمْ فَالْتَمِسُوا نُورًا فَضُرِبَ بَيْنَهُمْ بِسُورٍ لَهُ بَابٌ
بَاطِنُهُ فِيهِ الرَّحْمَةُ وَظَاهِرُهُ مِنْ قِبَلِهِ الْعَذَابُ ﴿١٣﴾

(57:13) ***The day the hypocrites, men and women, will say to the faithful, 'Please let up on us*** **(unẓurūnā)**, ***that we may glean*** **(naqtabis)** ***something from your light!' They will be told: 'Go back and grope for light!' Then there will be set up between them***

a wall with a gate, with mercy on its interior and punishment toward its exterior.

When the verb *naẓar* (from which *unẓurūnā* is derived) takes a direct object, this means to grant relief to or to wait for someone; when it takes an object with the preposition *ilā* ('to'), it means to look at something with one's sight; and when it takes an object with the preposition *fī* (lit. 'in'), it means to consider or ponder upon something.

Iqtibās (which is the origin of *naqtabis*) means to take a light from a fire.

The context of the verse indicates that, on that day, the hypocrites will be utterly covered by a canopy of darkness as they stumble towards their final abode. At the same time, the faithful are proceeding by the lights that hasten before them and on their right hand sides, which illuminate their path and guide them to their rightful stations. By contrast, the hypocritical men and women are completely swallowed by darkness and cannot find their way. Note that they are amongst the believers and counted amongst them at this stage of the Hereafter, just as they were while they were in this world, but the believing men and women hasten to paradise because of their lights while the hypocritical men and women fall behind covered in their darkness. Therefore, they ask the believing men and women to wait for them so that they can catch up and borrow their light to illuminate their own path.

They will be told: 'Go back and grope for light!' They will be told this either by the angels or by the highest of the faithful, such as those who are on the Heights (*al-Aʿrāf*).

In any case, this is only told to them by God's leave and, therefore, is ultimately His speech to them. As for what they are told—*Go back and grope for light!*—some have said that this is either intended to deride or mock them, just as they mocked the faithful in this world. As for, *Go back*, it appears that this means, to go back to this world. In short, the meaning is: 'Return to the material world which you have left behind having acted duplicitously therein, and seek from your deeds there a light to guide you or some faith, for you have no faith and no righteous deeds.'

Another possibility is that this is not intended as mockery, but rather to demonstrate the impossibility of this. In other words, *They will be told: 'Go back* to the material world *and grope for light* through faith and righteous deeds.' But they will not return to this world, nor are they able to. Therefore, the command to return to this world is like the command to prostrate that we read in the verse, *The day when the catastrophe occurs, and they are*

summoned to prostrate themselves, they will not be able. With a humbled look, they will be overcast by abasement. Certainly they were summoned to prostrate themselves while they were yet sound (68:42–43).

Some scholars have said that the command to 'go back' means to go back to the place where the light was initially apportioned amongst the faithful and to seek some light there. However, when they go back, they do not find anything there, so they return to the faithful only to find that a barrier has been set up between them. In this way, God deceives them just as they deceived and betrayed God in this world, *The hypocrites indeed seek to deceive Allah, but it is He who outwits them* (4:142).

Then there will be set up between them a wall with a gate, with mercy on its interior and punishment toward its exterior: This is like the wall of a city that separates its interior from the world outside. The pronoun '*them*' here refers to the faithful and the hypocrites together. In other words, a wall with a gate will be set up between the faithful and between the hypocrites that prevents members of either group from reaching members of the other.

Some have said that this wall is a reference to the Heights (*al-Aʿrāf*). This interpretation is not unlikely, and we have already discussed this in our commentary on the verse, *and there will be a veil between them. And on the Elevations will be certain men who recognise each of them by their mark* (7:46). Others have said, however, that this wall is distinct from the Heights.

Note that the verse says that this is *a wall <u>with a gate</u>*. This resembles the condition of the hypocrites in this world insofar as they were amongst the faithful therein and had a connection with them while also, at the same time, being veiled from them by a spiritual barrier. The presence of a gate also means that they can glimpse the inhabitants of paradise and this is to increase their grief and regret.

... with mercy on its interior and punishment toward its exterior: The fact that there is mercy on the interior of the wall, while its exterior faces towards punishment suggests that this wall surrounds the faithful—they are within it, while the hypocrites are outside of it. That the walls interior, where the faithful are situated, contains mercy, while its exterior, where the hypocrites are found, faces punishment corresponds to their respective attitudes to faith in this world. This wall, like faith, is a blessing to those who were sincere, and they will be overjoyed by it and benefit from it, but it is a source of punishment for the hypocrites, who will be troubled and pained by its existence.

يُنَادُونَهُمْ أَلَمْ نَكُنْ مَعَكُمْ ۖ قَالُوا بَلَىٰ وَلَٰكِنَّكُمْ فَتَنْتُمْ أَنْفُسَكُمْ وَتَرَبَّصْتُمْ وَارْتَبْتُمْ وَغَرَّتْكُمُ الْأَمَانِيُّ حَتَّىٰ جَاءَ أَمْرُ اللَّهِ وَغَرَّكُمْ بِاللَّهِ الْغَرُورُ ﴿١٤﴾

(57:14) ***They will call out to them, 'Did we not used to be with you?' They will say, 'Yes! But you cast yourselves into temptation, and you awaited and were doubtful, and false hopes deceived you until the edict of Allah arrived, and the Deceiver deceived you concerning Allah.'***

This verse begins with a fresh statement, as if in response to an implicit question: 'What will the hypocritical men and women do after this wall is placed between them and they see the punishment outside of it?' The answer is, *They will call out...*

In other words, the hypocritical men and women will call out to the faithful men and women and say, *did we not used to be with you?,* meaning that, through their outward show of faith, they were with the faithful men and women while they were in this world.

The remainder of the verse is the response of the faithful men and women to the hypocrites. *They*—the faithful men and women—*will say, 'Yes!*—you were with us in the material world!—*But you cast yourselves into temptation*—you were tried and perished—*and you awaited*—a turn of fate against the religion and its followers—*and were doubtful*—and were sceptical of your religion—*and false hopes deceived you*—such as the hope that the light of the religion would be extinguished and its people forsaken—*until the edict of Allah arrived*—meaning death—*and the Deceiver* (al-gharūr)—meaning Satan—*deceived you concerning Allah.'*

As should be evident to the reader, this verse shows that the hypocritical men and women will seek implore the faithful men and women to help them escape the darkness in which they find themselves, pleading that they used to be together in this world. Then, it shows, that the faithful men and women will respond by acknowledging that they were together, but that the hearts of the hypocrites did not match their outward state. Instead of sincerely believing, they cast themselves into temptation, anticipating that the religion of truth would be defeated, doubting it, being deceived by false hopes, and being deceived by Satan about God. These unpleasant attributes are all diseases that afflicted the hearts of the hypocrites. This shows that their

hearts were sick in this world, and nothing will benefit anyone on the Day of Resurrection save a healthy heart. God says elsewhere, *the day when neither wealth nor children will avail, except him who comes to Allah with a sound heart* (26:89).

فَالْيَوْمَ لَا يُؤْخَذُ مِنْكُمْ فِدْيَةٌ وَلَا مِنَ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا ۚ مَأْوَاكُمُ النَّارُ ۖ
هِيَ مَوْلَاكُمْ ۖ وَبِئْسَ الْمَصِيرُ ﴿١٥﴾

(57:15) ***'So today no ransom shall be taken from you, nor from the faithless. The Fire will be your abode: it is your refuge and an evil destination.'***

This is also part of what the faithful men and women will say to the hypocritical men and women, to whom they add the faithless, who are the ones who openly announced their disbelief. They say that they will all be held hostage to their deeds in this world, as we read in the verse, *Every soul is hostage to what it has earned* (74:38). No ransom will be accepted from them to save themselves from punishment. A ransom is anything that delivers someone from being held captive, whether a payment in return for their freedom or someone who comes to save them and free them. Both of these possibilities are excluded by the statement, *The Fire will be your abode: it is your refuge and an evil destination*.

When God says *the Fire will be your abode: it is your refuge* (mawlā) *and an evil destination*, this negates the possibility of anyone coming to help them or save them from Hell, they will not end up anywhere but in the Fire. Note that the verse describes the Fire as their *mawlā*, which literally means an ally, and the sentence, *it is your refuge* is phrased in a way that signifies exclusivity. The tone of this sentence as a whole is that of mockery and rebuke.

It is also possible to read *mawlā* in the meaning of the outcome of an affair (*mā yalī al-amr*), for they would invoke deities other than God for their needs, whether food, drink, clothing, shelter, or marriage, and whatever is other than God is, in reality, Hellfire. Therefore, their *mawlā* today is Hell, because it will provide all of those things for them: They will eat Zaqqūm, drink boiling water, dress in flaming robes, dwell in Hellfire, and have the devils as companions. There are many other verses in the Qur'an that describes the Fire as their abode (*ma'wā*), which literally means 'a place of repose.'

Examining Narrations

(1) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, al-Suyūṭī quotes Ibn Jarīr, Ibn Abī Ḥātim, Ibn Mardawayh, Abū Naʿīm in the *Dalāʾil*, all of whom narrate from Zayd b. Aslam, from ʿAṭāʾ b. Yasār, from Abū Saʿīd al-Khudrī: 'We went forth with the Messenger of God in the year of the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyya until we reached ʿUsfān. There, the Messenger of God said: 'They may be a people who will make you consider your deeds insignificant in comparison with theirs.' We asked, 'Who are these people, O Messenger of God? Are they from the Quraysh?' He said, 'No, rather they are the people of Yemen, who have the most receptive of minds and the softest of hearts.' We said, 'Are they better than us, O Messenger of God?' He said, 'If one of them had a mountain of gold and spent it all in the way of God, they would not reach the measure of one of you, and not even half of it. Lo, this surely a grace that distinguishes us from the rest of humankind. God says, *Not equal are those of you who spent and fought before the victory* (57:10).'

Author's comments: Similar traditions have come down via other chains of narration that also contain the verse. However, the problem with these reports is that the apparent context of the verses suggest that they were revealed after the victory, and this victory refers to either the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyya or the conquest of Mecca. Therefore, the verses themselves do not accord with the idea that they were revealed before this victory. And the above tradition claims that the verses were revealed before the Treaty of Ḥudaybiyya.

(2) In the same source, ʿAbd b. Ḥamīd and Ibn Mundhir narrate from ʿIkrama, 'When the verse was revealed, *Not equal are those of you who spent and fought before the victory*, Abū al-Daḥdāḥ said: 'By God, I will spend today so much that I will reach the level of those who came before me and which none who come after me will be able to surpass!' He said, 'O God, of everything that Abū al-Daḥdāḥ owns, half of it should go to you!' So he divided all of his property in half, until he reached the sole of his shoe and said, 'even this!'

(3) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, about the verse, *The day you will see the faithful, men and women, with their light moving swiftly before them and on their right* (57:12), we read: 'The light will be apportioned between humankind on the Day of Resurrection according to the strength of their faith. A share will be given to the hypocrite and it will be between the toes of his left foot. He will look to his light and then

tell the faithful: 'Wait there a moment so that I can borrow some of your light!' The faithful will tell the hypocrites, 'Go back and seek light from there!' Then there will be a wall with a gate raised between them, and the hypocrites will call out to the faithful from behind the wall, *'Did we not used to be with you?' They will say, 'Yes! But you cast yourselves into temptation*—through your sins—*and you awaited and were doubtful*—you doubted and awaited a turn of fate against the faithful.'

'So today no ransom shall be taken from you'—He said, 'By God, this does not refer to the Jews and the Christians, it only refers to the People of the Qibla!'

'*The Fire will be your abode: it is your refuge*'—He said, 'It is more entitled to you (*awlā bikum*).'

Author's comments: By 'the People of the Qibla', he means the hypocrites from amongst them.

(4) In *al-Kāfī*, al-Kulaynī transmits via his chain of narrators from Abān b. Taghlib: 'I heard Abū 'Abd Allāh (al-Ṣādiq) say, "Avoid far-fetched hopes, for they will deprive you of any happiness you have and diminish God's blessings in your sight, instead, you will be pursued by grief in whatever you deluded yourselves with.'

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Verses 16–24

This section of verses continues the aims of the previous section, which are to encourage the audience to have faith in God and His Messenger and to spend in the way of God. It rebukes the faithful for the signs of hard-heartedness that have appeared from them, and it encourages them to spend in the way of God by expounding the lofty station those who do will enjoy in the eyes of God. It commands them to hasten to God's forgiveness and to paradise, and it condemns this world and those of its inhabitants who are stingy and bid others to stinginess.

Note that the context of these verses has shifted from addressing the believers specifically to addressing everyone, Muslims and People of the Book alike, and we will explain the significance of this below.

أَلَمْ يَأْنِ لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا أَنْ تَخْشَعَ قُلُوبُهُمْ لِذِكْرِ اللَّهِ وَمَا نَزَلَ مِنَ الْحَقِّ وَلَا يَكُونُوا كَالَّذِينَ أُوتُوا الْكِتَابَ مِنْ قَبْلُ فَطَالَ عَلَيْهِمُ الْأَمَدُ فَقَسَتْ قُلُوبُهُمْ ۖ وَكَثِيرٌ مِنْهُمْ فَاسِقُونَ ﴿١٦﴾

(57:16) ***Is it not time yet*** **(a lam ya'ni)** ***for those who have faith that their hearts should be humbled*** **(an takhshaʿ qulūbuhum)** ***for Allah's remembrance and to the truth which has come down, and to be not like those who were given the Book before? Time took its toll on them and so their hearts were hardened, and many of them are transgressors.***

It is said that the verb *ya'nī* means for something's assigned time to have come, while for one's heart to be humbled means that it is affected by God's greatness and tremendousness. *Allah's remembrance* means anything by which God is remembered, and *the truth which has come down* refers to the Qur'an, which has come down from God almighty. It is natural that, when the believer remembers God, this evokes a sense of humility in him, just as when the truth is sent down by Him, this also inspires humility in those who believe in God and His messengers.

Some commentators have said that the meaning of both *Allah's remembrance* (*dhikr*) and *the truth which has come down* is the Qur'an, because both

of these descriptions highlight qualities that inspire humility in the faithful. After all, the Qur'an is the remembrance of God, which inspires humility, and it is also the truth which has come down from Him, which also inspires humility.

This verse subtly criticizes the faithful for the hardness that has crept into their hearts and their lack of humility in response to God's remembrance and the truth that has come down from Him. It compares their condition to those of the People of the Book to whom scriptures were revealed previously, but whose hearts were hardened over the passage of time.

... and to be not like those who were given the Book before? Time took its toll on them **(ṭāla ʿalayhum al–amad)** ***and so their hearts were hardened:*** This follows on from *... should be humbled ...*, above. In other words: 'And is it not time yet that their hearts should be humbled and that they should not be like those who were given the Book before.

Al-amad means time (*zamān*). Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī says: 'The difference between *amad* and *zamān* is that *amad* refers to a period of time with its end in mind, whereas *zamān* is general, encompassing both its beginning and its end. That is why some say *madā* ('extent') and *amad* are close in meaning.'

In this verse, God warns the faithful that their hearts are becoming similar to those of the People of the Book, whose hearts were hardened by the passage of time. A hard heart is one that does not experience humility and is not affected by the truth. This is possibly to the extent that it forsakes the mantle of servanthood altogether, no longer pays any attention to what is forbidden, and immerses itself in sin and transgression. That is why God follows the phrase, *their hearts were hardened* with the statement, *and many of them are transgressors*.

اعْلَمُوا أَنَّ اللَّهَ يُحْيِي الْأَرْضَ بَعْدَ مَوْتِهَا ۚ قَدْ بَيَّنَّا لَكُمُ الْآيَاتِ لَعَلَّكُمْ تَعْقِلُونَ ﴿١٧﴾

(57:17) ***Know that Allah revives the earth after its death. We have certainly made the signs clear for you so that you may apply reason.***

Having reprimanded the faithful for the hardness of their hearts, God now presents tis similitude to strengthen their resolve and encourage them to find humility once more.

Perhaps the entirety of the above reprimand can be read as an announcement by God that He will not leave the matter of religion to its own devices. On the contrary, as these hearts harden and are deprived of submissiveness to God's command, God brings new hearts that are alive with humility, which will worship Him as He desires to be worshipped.

Therefore, the meaning of this verse is in the same vein as the verse, *Ah! There you are, being invited to spend in the way of Allah; yet among you there are those who are stingy; and whoever is stingy is stingy only to himself. Allah is the All-sufficient, and you are all-needy, and if you turn away He will replace you with another people, and they will not be like you* (47:38).

This is also why God ends the verse with the refrain, *We have certainly made the signs clear for you so that you may apply reason*.

إِنَّ الْمُصَّدِّقِينَ وَالْمُصَّدِّقَاتِ وَأَقْرَضُوا اللَّهَ قَرْضًا حَسَنًا يُضَاعَفُ لَهُمْ وَلَهُمْ أَجْرٌ كَرِيمٌ ﴿١٨﴾

(57:18) ***Indeed the charitable men and charitable women, and those who lend Allah a good loan—it shall be multiplied for them, and there is a noble reward for them.***

Note that this verse repeats the promise to multiply the rewards of the faithful manyfold and to give them a noble reward in addition to this, this is to encourage them to spend in the way of God. However, this verse also adds the men and women who give charity to those who grant God a good loan. In other words: 'Those who give charity and those who give God a good loan, whatever they give will be multiplied for them, and they shall have a noble reward.'

وَالَّذِينَ آمَنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرُسُلِهِ أُولَٰئِكَ هُمُ الصِّدِّيقُونَ ۖ وَالشُّهَدَاءُ عِنْدَ رَبِّهِمْ لَهُمْ أَجْرُهُمْ وَنُورُهُمْ ۖ وَالَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا وَكَذَّبُوا بِآيَاتِنَا أُولَٰئِكَ أَصْحَابُ الْجَحِيمِ ﴿١٩﴾

(57:19) ***Those who have faith in Allah and His messengers—it is they who are the truthful and the witnesses with their Lord; they shall have their reward and their light. But as for those who are faithless and deny Our signs, they shall be the inmates of hell.***

Note that God does not say: 'Those who have faith in Allah and His

Messenger (singular)', as he says at the beginning of the chapter, in the verse, *Have faith in Allah and His Messenger* (57:5), and at its end, in the verse, *O you who have faith! Be wary of Allah and have faith in His Messenger* (57:28). This is because He has mentioned the People of the Book in the previous verse—*and to be not like those who were given the Book before*—which shifted the context from addressing the faithful specifically to addressing both the Muslims and the People of the Book together. In the same vein, He says a few verses below, *Certainly We sent Our messengers with manifest proofs* (57:25). Conversely, the verses at the beginning and the end of the chapter are addressed to the faithful in the nation of the Prophet in particular, and that is why 'His Messenger' is mentioned in the singular, rather than 'messengers' in the plural.

The meaning of '*faith in Allah and His messengers*' here means pure faith that is innately inseparable from submission and obedience, as has already been highlighted in the verse, *Have faith in Allah and His Messenger* (57:5), above. When God says, *it is they who are the truthful and the witnesses with their Lord*, this means that those who have faith in God and His messengers will be amongst the truthful and the witnesses, as indicated by the qualifying phrases, *with their Lord* and *they shall have their reward and their light*. Therefore, they will be admitted to these two groups and treated in the same manner as the truthful and the witnesses, given the same reward and the same light to guide them in the Hereafter.

It appears that '*the truthful and the witnesses*' refers to those mentioned in the verse, *Whoever obeys Allah and the Apostle—they are with those whom Allah has blessed, including the prophets and the truthful, the witnesses, and the righteous, and excellent companions are they* (4:69). In our commentary on this verse, we discussed how the truthful (*al-siddīqīn*) were the ones who were honest in their words and deeds, such that their words matched their actions, and their actions matched their words. Meanwhile, the witnesses (*al-shuhadā'*) denote the witnesses to deeds on the Day of Resurrection, rather than those who are martyred in the way of God.

Therefore, those who believe in God and His messengers will be admitted to the ranks of the truthful and the witnesses, who will enjoy a lofty station with God—by His decree, in other words—and they will have their reward and their light.

When God says, *they shall have their reward and their light*, the pronoun '*they*' refers to those who have faith in God and His messengers, while the two instances of the pronoun '*their*' refers to the truthful and the witnesses.

In other words, those who have faith in God and His messengers shall have the same reward and light as that given to the truthful and the witnesses by God. This is it what it means when someone says the verse means: 'They shall have a reward like their reward, and they shall have a light like their light.'

Perhaps one might say that the intent of the verse is to show that they themselves are the truthful and the witnesses in actuality, not that they will merely be admitted to their ranks or made equivalent to them. Therefore, they shall have their own reward and their own light. However, the context does not really support such a reading.

Another interpretation is that '*the witnesses*' is not joined to '*the truthful*' or follow on from it but is actually the start of a new sentence. In this case, '*the witnesses*' is the subject of a new nominal sentence, and its predicate is '*with their Lord*' and '*they shall have their reward*.' Therefore, the verse is split into two parts: 'Those who have faith in God and His messengers, it is they who are the truthful.' This is one statement. There then begins a new one, 'And the witnesses are with their Lord'—in the same vein as the verse, *rather they are living and provided for near their Lord* (3:169). In this case, the meaning of '*the witnesses*' (shuhadā') is, in fact, those martyred in the way of God. Then God completes this statement with the words, '*they shall have their reward and their light*.'

But as for those who are faithless and deny Our signs, they shall be the inmates of hell: In other words, they shall never depart from it and will remain in it forever.

Notice how in this verse God turns from discussing the condition of those who are admitted to the ranks of the truthful and the witnesses to discuss the state of those who disbelieve and deny His signs. The first are, without a doubt, are the best of humankind and the ones of them who have definitely attained salvation, while the latter are assuredly the worst of humankind and the ones of them who have definitely perished. However, there remains a group between these two groups; the believers who have committed various kinds of sins and misdeeds and, in doing so, rebelled against God and His Messenger. This is the habit of the Qur'anic discourse in many of the instances where God discusses the conditions of various people on the Day of Resurrection therein.

God adopts this approach in the Qur'an in order to inspire both hope and fear in this middle group that find themselves caught between the best and the worst, so that they might incline towards everlasting felicity and choose salvation over damnation. That is why God follows this verse with a

condemnation of the life of this world, to which the hearts of those who are resistant to spending in the way of God have become attached.

اعْلَمُوا أَنَّمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا لَعِبٌ وَلَهْوٌ وَزِينَةٌ وَتَفَاخُرٌ بَيْنَكُمْ وَتَكَاثُرٌ
فِي الْأَمْوَالِ وَالْأَوْلَادِ ۖ كَمَثَلِ غَيْثٍ أَعْجَبَ الْكُفَّارَ نَبَاتُهُ ثُمَّ يَهِيجُ فَتَرَاهُ
مُصْفَرًّا ثُمَّ يَكُونُ حُطَامًا ۖ وَفِي الْآخِرَةِ عَذَابٌ شَدِيدٌ وَمَغْفِرَةٌ مِنَ اللَّهِ
وَرِضْوَانٌ ۚ وَمَا الْحَيَاةُ الدُّنْيَا إِلَّا مَتَاعُ الْغُرُورِ ﴿٢٠﴾

(57:20) ***Know that the life of this world is just play*** **(laʿb)** ***and diversion*** **(lahw)***, and glitter* **(zīna)***, and mutual vainglory* **(tafākhur)** ***among you and covetousness*** **(takāthur)** ***for wealth and children—like the rain whose vegetation impresses the farmer; then it withers and you see it turn yellow, then it becomes chaff, while in the Hereafter there is a severe punishment and forgiveness from Allah and His pleasure; and the life of this world is nothing but the wares of delusion.***

Laʿb ('play') denotes an activity with imaginary goals rather than real ones, such as the games of children.

Lahw ('diversion') refers to anything that distracts a person from their important goals.

Zīna ('glitter') refers to any kind of adornment, whereby something desirable or valuable is attached to something else to make it more desirable because of the beauty it confers upon it.

Tafākhur ('mutual vainglory') means to boast of one's lineage or ran.

Takāthur ('covetousness') in wealth and children means to seek an increase of them.

The life of this world is transitory and illusory—a false image that is afflicted by all five of the aforementioned traits: It is play, diversion, glitter, mutual vainglory, and covetousness. It is to these things that the human's low desires attach themselves, whether to some of them or all of them. These are imaginary matters and fleeting gains that will not endure for the human being. None of them can provide the human being with any real good or nurture any growth in their soul.

The great Safavid-era jurist, philosopher, and mystic, Shaykh Bahāʾī, remarked that the five traits of this world mentioned in this verse correspond to the five stages of the human being's life herein. He is first carried away by

play in his childhood or adolescence; then he grows and matures, and he becomes interested in diversions and distractions; then he grows and matures, and becomes focused on adornments such as fine-looking clothes, impressive mounts, and high rank, because of the beauty and majesty he perceives in them; then when he grows older, he becomes boastful of his lineage or rank; then, when he grows old, he is concerned with amassing ever more wealth and descendants.

... like the rain* (ghayth) *whose vegetation impresses the farmers* (kuffār)*; then it surges* (yahīju)*, and you see it turn yellow, then it becomes chaff* (huṭām)*: This is a parable given for the trinkets of the life of this world that the human being becomes attached to and is deceived by, but which will not remain his for long before he is forced to give them up.

Ghayth is a downpour of rain.

Kuffār here is the plural of *kāfir*, not in the sense of 'disbeliever' but rather of 'farmer', as the *kāfir* is someone who ploughs the earth.

Yahīj (to surge) means to move.

Huṭām refers to the broken up pieces of desiccated plants.

The meaning of the verse is: 'In its captivating but fleeting delight, this world is like rain, which causes vegetation to flourish in a way that impresses the farmers, but once this vegetation has reached its utmost growth, you see it turn yellow in color, then it withers and crumble to chaff that is carried away by the wind.'

... while in the Hereafter there is a severe punishment and forgiveness from Allah and His pleasure: God's forgiveness is mentioned before His pleasure because forgiveness purifies the receptacle of that pleasure. Note also that this forgiveness is described as being '*from Allah*' while punishment is not, and this suggests that what God really desires is to forgive humankind rather than to punish them, and that punishment is only necessary because the human being forsakes the mantle of divine servanthood.

... and the life of this world is nothing but the wares of delusion: In other words, it is a provision that nurtures delusion, and this is dependent upon the one who is deluded by it.

The phrase, *while in the Hereafter there is a severe punishment and forgiveness from Allah and His pleasure*, highlights the two aspects of the Hereafter, so that the listener might be aware of them and choose God's forgiveness and pleasure over His punishment. Then, when God says, *and the life of this world is nothing but the wares of delusion*, He warns the listener to be on guard lest the life of this world deceives and misleads him with its delusions.

سَابِقُوا إِلَىٰ مَغْفِرَةٍ مِنْ رَبِّكُمْ وَجَنَّةٍ عَرْضُهَا كَعَرْضِ السَّمَاءِ وَالْأَرْضِ
أُعِدَّتْ لِلَّذِينَ آمَنُوا بِاللَّهِ وَرُسُلِهِ ۚ ذَٰلِكَ فَضْلُ اللَّهِ يُؤْتِيهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ ۚ وَاللَّهُ
ذُو الْفَضْلِ الْعَظِيمِ ﴿٢١﴾

(57:21) ***Take the lead*** **(sābiqū)** ***towards forgiveness from your Lord and a paradise as vast as the heavens and the earth, prepared for those who have faith in Allah and His messengers. That is Allah's grace, which He grants to whomever He wishes, and Allah is dispenser of a great grace.***

The imperative *sābiqū* ('take the lead') is derived from *musābaqa* ('to race'), which means to vie with one another to reach a goal first. Each racer tries to outrun his rivals so that he reaches the end first. Therefore, *musābaqa* conveys something more than *musāraʿa* ('to hasten'), as *musāraʿa* simply means to move quickly and determinedly, while *musābaqa* means to move quickly and determinedly in order to outrun one's rivals and beat them to a goal.

Therefore, when God says, *take the lead towards forgiveness*, this places an even greater responsibility on His servants' shoulders than, *And hasten towards your Lord's forgiveness and a paradise as vast as the heavens and the earth, prepared for the Godwary* (3:133).

This also illustrates the lack of validity in opinion that the verse in Sūrah Āl ʿImrān is about the Foremost Ones who are brought near to God (*al-sābiqūn al-muqarrabūn*), while the present verse is about the generality of the faithful. Proponents of this view argue this based on the fact that the present verse only mentions faith in God and His Messenger, while the verse from Sūrah Āl ʿImrān also mentions righteous deeds. That is also why the paradise promised in that verse is described as being *as vast as the heavens* (al-samāwāt—plural) *and the earth*, while in this verse, it is only described as *as vast as the heavens* (al-samāʾ—singular) *and the earth*. They say this shows that the paradise promised to those addressed in the first verse is vaster than the one promised in the present verse.

However, this opinion lacks validity because what is being asked of the listener in this verse is greater than what is being asked of them in the verse from Sūrah Āl ʿImrān. This is because the word *al-samāʾ* takes the definite article (*al-*) in the present verse, and this article marks it as denoting the category of the heavens. Therefore it has the same meaning as *al-samāwāt* in the

previous verse.

In the present verse, forgiveness is placed before paradise, because life in paradise is a pure life in a pure realm. Therefore, in order to enjoy such a life, one must first be cleansed of the impurities of sins and their pollutions.

Note also that the word *ʿaraḍ* is used to describe paradise as vast here, and that it is not being used merely in the sense of breadth (as opposed to length, or *ṭuwal*), which is the meaning of the term *ʿaraḍ* in everyday speech. The context of the statement shows that it is intended to convey the superlative expansiveness of paradise.

Some have argued that *ʿaraḍ* here is, in fact, being used in the sense of breadth, but that this is actually a rhetorical device to emphasise the vastness of paradise. As, if only its breadth is vaster than the heavens and the earth, then how massive would it be if we were to take into account its length as well? Furthermore, breadth also tends to be the shortest dimension of a thing, therefore its length must be even greater still.

However, this is a somewhat arbitrary reading of the verse, as there is nothing to suggest in it that the length of the heavens and the earth is equal to their breadth. Neither is there anything to suggest that the length of paradise is greater than its breadth, such that this would entail its length being greater than the length of the heavens and the earth. It is entirely possibly that the length and breadth of both the heavens and the earth and paradise are equal, in the same way that all the sides of a square, circle, cube, or sphere are equal to one another, and it is still possible that one dimension could be greater than the others. There is simply no evidence for either possibility to be found in the verse.

... prepared for those who have faith in Allah and His messengers: From the phrase, *have faith in Allah and His messengers*, and the phrase, *those who have faith in Allah and His messengers* (57:19), it is evident that faith in God and His messengers refers a lofty level of faith whose effects are manifest in its bearer in the form of doing righteous deeds and avoiding sins and transgressions.

Some have claimed that the verse contains glad tidings for all of the faithful when God says, *... prepared for those who have faith in Allah and His messengers*, as faith here is not predicated upon any conditions such as righteous deeds. However, this reading and others like it are not valid because, if we wished to interpret the verse only on the basis of its wording, then it would include both the faithful and the faithless, and the righteous and the sinners. Rather, because the verse is, in fact, addressed to the faithful, it exhorts them

to the kind of faith that is accompanied by righteous deeds. Had it meant mere belief in God and His messengers not necessarily accompanied by righteous deeds, and paradise was prepared for them, and the verse was calling them to hasten to God's forgiveness and paradise, then the command, *take the leave* would only be directed to the faithless, as the believers would have already reached the goal through mere belief. However, the verse's context does not allow for such a reading.

That is Allah's grace, which He grants to whomever He wishes: And He has willed that He will grant it to those who have faith in God and His messengers. As we have explained already, the reward that God grants to His faithful servants is a grace and a favour from Him rather than something they have earned or made themselves deserving of.

... and Allah is dispenser of a great grace: This highlights the tremendousness of His grace, and shows that the forgiveness and paradise with which He will reward the faithful is given out of this tremendous grace.

مَا أَصَابَ مِنْ مُصِيبَةٍ فِي الْأَرْضِ وَلَا فِي أَنْفُسِكُمْ إِلَّا فِي كِتَابٍ مِنْ قَبْلِ أَنْ نَبْرَأَهَا ۚ إِنَّ ذَٰلِكَ عَلَى اللَّهِ يَسِيرٌ ﴿٢٢﴾

(57:22) ***No affliction*** **(muṣība)** ***visits the earth or yourselves but it is in a book before We bring it about*** **(nabra'ahā)*****—that is indeed easy for Allah—***

A *muṣība* ('affliction') is a misfortune that befalls (*tuṣīb*) something, it is derived from the verb *iṣāba*, which refers to an arrow hitting its mark. In terms of its basic meaning, *iṣāba* can include both good and ill. However, it is most commonly used for misfortunes. Therefore, a *muṣība* usually denotes a form of adversity.

An affliction visited on the earth refers to drought, blight, devastating earthquakes, and the like, while an affliction visited upon the selves refers to illness, injury, or death.

Bar' and *burū'* (from which the verb *nabra'ahā*, 'We bring about') means to create from nothingness. The pronoun '*it*' in *We bring it about* refers back to *affliction*, although some scholars have said it refers to *yourselves*, *the earth*, or to both *the earth* and *yourselves* and *affliction*. The first possibility is supported by the fact that the verse occurs in the context of expounding the misfortunes that people face in this world, that lead to the loss of wealth and lives, which lead them then to hold back from spending in God's way and

hang back from waging *jihād*.

The *book* references in this verse is the Tablet upon which is written all that was, all that is, and all that will be until the Day of Resurrection, as indicated by numerous verses and narrations. This verse only mentions it in regard to the afflictions that befall the earth and its inhabitants, because that is the subject under discussion here.

Some have said that the verse has only restricted *affliction* to *in the earth or yourselves* because not all afflictions are inscribed upon the Tablet, because the Tablet is finite and events in this world are infinite, and the finite cannot be a receptacle for the infinite.

However, this interpretation appears to be based on the idea the tablet in this verse is a material one suspended in the sky somewhere, upon which events are inscribed in some language in a script that resembles our own human writings. We have already discussed the meaning of the Tablet and the Pen elsewhere, but we shall make some additional remarks below.

Others have said that the book here refers to the book of God's knowledge. However, this runs contrary to the apparent meaning of the verse, unless, of course, it is referring to the book in which all the events of this world are inscribed as a level of God's knowledge at the level of the divine acts (*al-ʿilm al-fiʿlī*).

The verse concludes with the words, *that is indeed easy for Allah* to show that determining that events should happen before they occur and ordaining that they should come to pass with an irrevocable decree is not something difficult for Him.

لِكَيْلَا تَأْسَوْا عَلَىٰ مَا فَاتَكُمْ وَلَا تَفْرَحُوا بِمَا آتَاكُمْ ۗ وَاللَّهُ لَا يُحِبُّ كُلَّ مُخْتَالٍ فَخُورٍ ﴿٢٣﴾

(57:23) ***so that you may not grieve for what escapes you, nor exult for what He gives you, and Allah does not like any swaggering braggart.***

This verse explains the rationale for the previous one, meaning it explains why such events are inscribed in a book before they come to pass. It is so that you do not grieve for the bounties that you lose or exult for what bounties God bestows upon you. This is because, when the human being is certain that whatever befalls him is ordained to happen and unavoidable, he will not err and will remember that whatever blessings He is given are merely

a deposit that he holds in trust until a specified time, then he will not be overly grieved if he loses these blessings, nor will he be overjoyed if he is given more of them.

It is said that there is a difference between *what escapes you* and *what He gives you*, insomuch as the former is attributed to the things themselves, while the latter is attributed to God. This is because *what escapes you* refers to loss and non-existence, which pertain to the essences of things, as if things are left to their own devices, they will not last and will pass away. This is utterly unlike their coming into being and their remaining existent, as this can only come about through God's intervention. Therefore, it is attributed to Him rather than the things themselves.

... and Allah does not like any swaggering braggart **(mukhtāl fakhūr)*:*** According to al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, a *mukhtāl* ('braggart') is someone taken by conceitedness (*khuyalā'*), an arrogance which emanates from imagining (*takhayyul*) that he possesses a certain virtue. Meanwhile, a *fakhūr* is someone who abounds in pride (*fakhr*) and vanity. Both conceitedness and pride stem from a person's false belief that they are deserving of whatever blessings they possess. This runs contrary to the reality of the matter, which is that they possess whatever they have only by virtue of God assigning it to them, not because of anything to do with their own selves. Therefore, conceitedness and pride are both moral vices and are not liked by God.

الَّذِينَ يَبْخَلُونَ وَيَأْمُرُونَ النَّاسَ بِالْبُخْلِ ۗ وَمَنْ يَتَوَلَّ فَإِنَّ اللَّهَ هُوَ الْغَنِيُّ الْحَمِيدُ ﴿٢٤﴾

(57:24) ***Such as are stingy and bid people to be stingy. And whoever refuses to comply, indeed Allah is the All-sufficient, the All-laudable.***

This is a description of every swaggering braggart, explaining why it is that God does not like them. The reason why they hoard their wealth is that their pride and conceitedness depend upon it, and the reason why they bid others to do likewise is because they like to have wealth themselves, so they like to have others have it to. This is because, were people to be generous, open-handed, and enthusiastic about spending in the way of God, this would bring their own stinginess to light.

And whoever refuses to comply, indeed Allah is the All-sufficient, the All-laudable: This refers to those who turn away from spending in the

way of God and refuse to heed God's admonishments. Furthermore, they are those whose hearts are not assured by the Qur'anic condemnation of this world, its lofty descriptions of paradise, or by the knowledge that God is the one who determines all things. Such persons should know that God is the All-sufficient (*al-Ghanī*), which means He does not have any need of their what they spend, and He is All-laudable in whatever He does.

Therefore, these three verses—from *No affliction visits the earth or yourselves ...* (57:22) until *... Allah is the All-sufficient, the All-laudable* (57:24)—as is evident, encourage people to spend in the way of God and admonish them against being stingy and withholding their wealth. They do this by encouraging them to practice renunciation (*zuhd*) by neither being grieved by what escapes them nor overjoyed by what God gives them, based on the knowledge that all affairs have been ordained and decreed in a divine book before God even brought them into being.

Examining Narrations

(1) In *al-Durr al-manthūr*, concerning the verse, *Is it not time yet...?* (57:16), al-Suyūṭī narrates from Ibn al-Mubārak, ʿAbd al-Razzāq, and Ibn Mundhir, all of whom narrate from al-Aʿmash: 'When the Companions of the Messenger of God came to Medina and found their lives easier after all the hardship they had endured, it is as though they became lax in some of the things about which they had previously been observant. Therefore, the verse was revealed, *Is it not time yet for those who have faith ...?*

Author's comments: This is the most upright of the narrations about the context in which the verses of this chapter were revealed. There is also a narration from Ibn Masʿūd, in which he says: 'We had not been Muslims for four years before God rebuked us with the verse, *Is it not time yet for those who have faith that their hearts should be humbled for Allah's remembrance*.' The narration appears to suggest that the chapter was revealed in Mecca. Another narration seems to affirm the same thing when it says that it was after this chapter was revealed that ʿUmar converted to Islam. However, you know that the tone and the context of the verses of this chapter clearly mark it as being of Medinan provenance. It is possible to interpret the narration of Ibn Masʿūd as meaning that the verse in question or that both it and the verses that followed it were revealed in Mecca, but not the remainder of the verses of the chapter.

There is also a narration from the Prophet, which reads: 'God found

the hearts of the Emigrants slow to respond to Him seventeen years after the beginning of the Qur'an's revelation, so God sent down the verse, *Is it not time yet...?*.' This suggests that the verse was revealed in the fourth or fifth year after the Emigration to Medina. Yet another narration, this time from Ibn ʿAbbās, says: 'God found the hearts of the Emigrants slow to respond to Him, so He rebuked them some thirteen years after the Qur'an's revelation had first come down, saying, *Is it not time yet...?*' This would indicate that the chapter was revealed at around the time of the Emigration. However, neither of these reports are in keeping with the context and tone of the verses.

(2) Also in *al-Durr al-manthūr*, al-Suyūṭī narrates from Ibn al-Jarīr from al-Barrāʾ b. ʿĀzib: 'I heard the Messenger of God say, "The faithful of my nation are witnesses." Then the Prophet recited the verse, *Those who have faith in Allah and His messengers—it is they who are the truthful and the witnesses with their Lord* (57:19).

(3) In *Tafsīr al-ʿAyyāshī*, it is narrated via a chain going back to Manhāl al-Qaṣṣāb: 'I said to Abū ʿAbd Allāh (al-Ṣādiq), "Invoke God to grant me martyrdom (*shahāda*)." He replied, "The faithful one is already a witness (*shahīd*)." Then he recited this verse.'

Author's comments: There are other narrations with the same meaning, and it appears that some of them, like this narration, use the term *shahīd* to mean one who is slain in the way of God.

(4) In *Tafsīr al-Qummī*, it is narrated via a chain of narrators from Ḥafṣ b. Ghiyāth: 'I said to Abū ʿAbd Allāh, "May I be your sacrifice, what is renunciation of this world (*al-zuhd fī al-dunyā*)?" He said, "God has defined it in His Book with the verse, *so that you may not grieve for what escapes you, nor exult for what He gives you* (57:23)."'

(5) In *Nahj al-Balāgha*, Imām ʿAlī says, 'Renunciation in its entirety is contained between two statements in the Qur'an: *so that you may not grieve for what escapes you, nor exult for what He gives you*. Whoever does not grieve for what has past nor exult for what is to come, he has held fast to renunciation from both sides.'

Author's comments: The foundation of these two narrations is that renunciation means not to allow one's heart to become attached to this world. There is a well-known tradition which reads, 'Love of this world is the source of every sin.'

Verses 25–29

In the previous section, God called attention to the hardening hearts of the faithful and their laxity and reluctance to obey the ordinances of His religion, especially those pertaining to spending in the way of God, which is in support of the command to fight in His way. In that section, He compared them to the People of the Book, whose hearts also hardened with the passage of time.

This section explains that the goal of God in sending divine messengers to humankind and sending down the Book and the Balance with them is so that people might maintain justice and live in a just and fair society. It also says that He sent down iron to try His servants with the duty of defending their virtuous community and spreading the word of truth in the land, in addition to the benefits that they can obtain through its use.

Then it mentions that God sent Noah and Abraham and placed prophethood and scripture amongst their descendants, and followed them with messenger after messenger. And that this continued amongst the nations, with some of them having faith and being guided and many of them transgressing. The chapter ends by calling on the faithful to perfect and complete their faith that they may receive a double measure of mercy.

لَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا رُسُلَنَا بِالْبَيِّنَاتِ وَأَنْزَلْنَا مَعَهُمُ الْكِتَابَ وَالْمِيزَانَ لِيَقُومَ النَّاسُ بِالْقِسْطِ ۖ وَأَنْزَلْنَا الْحَدِيدَ فِيهِ بَأْسٌ شَدِيدٌ وَمَنَافِعُ لِلنَّاسِ وَلِيَعْلَمَ اللَّهُ مَنْ يَنْصُرُهُ وَرُسُلَهُ بِالْغَيْبِ ۚ إِنَّ اللَّهَ قَوِيٌّ عَزِيزٌ ﴿٢٥﴾

(57:25) ***Certainly We sent Our messengers with manifest proofs, and We sent down with them the Book and the Balance, so that mankind may maintain justice; and We sent down iron, in which there is great might and uses for mankind, and so that Allah may know those who help Him and His messengers in (their) absence. Indeed Allah is all-strong, all-mighty.***

This verse represents the beginning of a new discussion, which explains the meaning of promulgating the religion of truth by sending messengers and sending down the Book and the Balance with them. It says that the goal behind this is so that human beings can maintain justice, and that God tested

humankind by sending down iron, to distinguish those who will come to God's aid in the absence of the messengers. It also shows that prophethood is something that continued through the generations of humankind, and that some members of each nation were guided, while many were transgressors.

Certainly We sent Our messengers with manifest proofs: That is, with clear signs that showed them to be prophets sent by God, such as wondrous miracles, manifest prophecies, and definitive arguments.

... and We sent down with them the Book: Referring to the revelation that can be written down and thus become scripture, containing the teachings of the religion, including beliefs and practices. This refers to five scriptures in total: Those of Noah, Abraham, the Torah, the Evangel, and the Qur'an.

... and the Balance* (al–Mīzān)*, so that mankind may maintain justice: Scholars have said a *mīzān* refers to a scale with two hands that is used to measure weights and say that the phrase, *so that mankind may maintain justice*, explains the purpose of sending down the Balance.

Therefore, the meaning of the verse is: 'We sent down the Balance so that humankind may maintain justice in their dealings and not lose through errors in the measurement of weights or in ascertaining the relative value of one thing to another.' This is because the human being's life depends upon community, and community depends upon the dealings and exchanges of goods and services between its members, and dealings involving weights depends upon maintaining the relative value of different things, and this is the purpose of the Balance.

It is possible that the Balance in this verse symbolizes the religion, for the religion is the measure of people's beliefs and their deeds, and it is the religion that constitutes the foundation of a happy life for people, both in a community and as individuals. This interpretation fits well with the context of the verse, insofar as it occurs within a discussion about people's reverence for God versus the hardness of their hearts, and their seriousness and laxity in the matter of religion. Some have also said that the Balance here symbolizes justice or intellect.

... and We sent down iron: This appears to be in the same vein as the verse, *... and He has sent down for you eight mates of the cattle* (39:6). In our commentary on this verse, we saw that God refers to the act of creating things upon the earth as 'sending down' (*inzāl*). This is because He describes the coming into being of things in the cosmos as their being 'sent down' from the treasuries that exist with him, and from the realm of the Unseen to the

material realm, *There is not a thing but that its sources are with Us, and We do not send it down except in a known measure* (15:21).

... in which there is great might **(ba's)** ***and uses for mankind:*** The term *ba's* means to be powerful in effect, and it is usually used to refer to violence. Wars, battles, and all manner of defensive actions have depended on iron and the arms and armor made from it ever since human beings became aware of it and learnt how to utilise it.

As for the uses it provides for humankind, these are self-evident and do not require explanation, for iron is used in all areas of life and all industries in one form or another.

... and so that Allah may know those who help Him and His messengers in absence: This phrase explains the purpose for which God sent down iron. In the context of this verse, helping God and His messengers means to strive in His way by waging *jihād* in order to defend the community of the faithful from its enemies and spread the message of truth. To help Him in absence here means to help while He is absent from them or when they are absent from Him. The verse says *so that Allah may know those who help* does not mean that God does not know who will help, rather it means so that they might be distinguished from those who do not know in the external world.

The verse concludes with the coda, *indeed Allah is all-strong, all-mighty*, is to emphasise that God's command to them to strive in His way was only to distinguish which of them will obey His commands from which will not, and not because He has any need for a helper to come to His aid, this is because He is all-powerful, not afflicted by any weakness, and all-mighty, not afflicted by any limitation.

وَلَقَدْ أَرْسَلْنَا نُوحًا وَإِبْرَاهِيمَ وَجَعَلْنَا فِي ذُرِّيَّتِهِمَا النُّبُوَّةَ وَالْكِتَابَ ۖ فَمِنْهُمْ مُهْتَدٍ ۖ وَكَثِيرٌ مِنْهُمْ فَاسِقُونَ ﴿٢٦﴾

(57:26) ***Certainly We sent Noah and Abraham and We ordained among their descendants prophethood and the Book. Some of them are guided, and many of them are transgressors.***

In this verse, God begins to explain that being guided and transgression were tendencies that existed from past nations until the present day amongst all their members, and, in fact, many of them remain transgressors. The pronoun '*them*' in *some of them are guided, and many of them are transgressors*, refers back to '*their descendants*.' The remainder of the verse's meaning is

clear.

ثُمَّ قَفَّيْنَا عَلَىٰ آثَارِهِمْ بِرُسُلِنَا وَقَفَّيْنَا بِعِيسَى ابْنِ مَرْيَمَ وَآتَيْنَاهُ الْإِنْجِيلَ وَجَعَلْنَا فِي قُلُوبِ الَّذِينَ اتَّبَعُوهُ رَأْفَةً وَرَحْمَةً وَرَهْبَانِيَّةً ابْتَدَعُوهَا مَا كَتَبْنَاهَا عَلَيْهِمْ إِلَّا ابْتِغَاءَ رِضْوَانِ اللَّهِ فَمَا رَعَوْهَا حَقَّ رِعَايَتِهَا ۖ فَآتَيْنَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا مِنْهُمْ أَجْرَهُمْ ۖ وَكَثِيرٌ مِنْهُمْ فَاسِقُونَ ﴿٢٧﴾

(57:27) ***Then We followed them up*** **(qaffaynā ʿalā āthāri–him)** ***with Our messengers and We followed with Jesus son of Mary, and We gave him the Evangel, and We put in the hearts of those who followed him kindness and mercy. But as for monasticism, they innovated it—We had not prescribed it for them—only seeking Allah's pleasure. Yet they did not observe it with due observance. So We gave to the faithful among them their reward, but many of them are transgressors.***

In *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, we read: '*Taqfiyya* ('to follow', from which *qaffaynā* is derived) means to continuously place one thing after another. That is why the word *qawāfī*—which is derived from the same root—is used to refer to the rhyme-scheme of poetry, as the rhyme of the poem depends upon the ending of the verses, and the rhyme appears at the end of each and every verse of the poem.'

The pronoun '*them*' in '*We followed them up*' refers to Noah, Abraham, and those of their descendants who have come before. The evidence for this is that there is no prophet after Noah save that they were from His descendants, because all of humanity is descended from Noah. As for the fact that Jesus is a descendant of Abraham, see the verse about Noah, *and made his descendants the survivors* (37:77); and the verse, *and from his offspring, David and Solomon ... and Zechariah, John, Jesus ...* (6:85). Therefore, the meaning of the verse, *then We followed them up with Our messengers*, means: 'We followed Noah and Abraham with their later descendants and their earlier descendants...'

The phrase, *We followed them up*, also shows that there is a single path, in which each prophet follows the previous one.

... and We followed with Jesus son of Mary, and We gave him the Evangel, and We put in the hearts of those who followed him kindness and mercy: According to what commentators have said, *kindness and mercy*

are synonymous with one another, though some relate that kindness (*ra'fa*) refers to repelling harm, while mercy (*raḥma*) refers to attracting benefit.

When God says that He put kindness and mercy in the hearts of those who follow Jesus, this means that He inspired them to show kindness and mercy to one another. So they lived on the basis of mutual support and peacefulness, in a similar vein to God's description of those who are with the Prophet, *merciful amongst themselves* (48:29). Some have said that putting kindness and mercy in their hearts means commanding them to show kindness and mercy to one another and promising a divine reward in return.

But as for monasticism* (ruhbāniyya)*, they innovated it* (ibtadaʿū–hā)*—We had not prescribed it for them: The term *rubhābiyya* is originally derived from the word *rahba*, meaning 'fear' (*khashya*), it is commonly used to refer to someone who has isolated himself from other people to worship God out of fear of Him. *Ibtidāʿ* ('to innovate') means to devise something without precedent in religion, tradition, or craft. When God says, *We had not prescribed it for them*, it is as though this is in response to the question, 'What do you mean that they innovated it?'

Therefore, the meaning is: 'They made monasticism up for themselves; We did not ordain it for them.'

... only seeking Allah's pleasure. Yet they did not observe it with due observance: Meaning that we did not impose monasticism on them, but they imposed it on themselves in pursuit of God's pleasure and His reward. However, they did not maintain it as they should, because they overstepped its bounds. This also suggests that this was still something pleasing to God, even if He did not legislate it and they innovated it.

So We gave to the faithful among them their reward, but many of them are transgressors: This shows that Jesus's nation was like those of other messengers before it, in that it contained believers who will be rewarded for their faith but also that many of them—in fact, most of them—were transgressors.

يَا أَيُّهَا الَّذِينَ آمَنُوا اتَّقُوا اللَّهَ وَآمِنُوا بِرَسُولِهِ يُؤْتِكُمْ كِفْلَيْنِ مِنْ رَحْمَتِهِ
وَيَجْعَلْ لَكُمْ نُورًا تَمْشُونَ بِهِ وَيَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ ۚ وَاللَّهُ غَفُورٌ رَحِيمٌ ﴿٢٨﴾

(57:28) ***O you who have faith! Be wary of Allah and have faith in His Messenger. He will grant you a double share of His mercy and give you a light to walk by, and forgive you, and Allah is all-forgiving, all-merciful;***

In this verse, God commands the faithful to be wary of Him and to have faith in His Messenger. Note that those '*who have faith*' already have faith in God and His Messenger. Therefore, the meaning of this command to have faith in the Messenger is to follow him fully and obey him completely in his commands and prohibitions, whether these commands and prohibitions pertain to divine laws or his role as the ruler of the nation. This is as God says elsewhere, *But no, by your Lord! They will not believe until they make you a judge in their disputes, then do not find within their hearts any dissent to your verdict and submit in full submission* (4:65).

Therefore, this is a command to have faith to those who already have faith, which represents a higher level of faith than mere belief, whereby a person's faith is sufficiently weak that it might not lead to action emanating from them. This explains the meaning of the phrase, *He will grant you a double share of His mercy*—as He is promising reward upon reward, just as He is commanding faith upon faith.

Some have said that the meaning of God granting them a double share of His mercy means giving them double the reward of the faithful from the People of the Book. It is as if to say, 'He will give you the reward He promised to the People of the Book twice over, because, like them, you believe in all the previous prophets, but you also believe in the Final Prophet without drawing any distinction between one messenger and another.'

... and give you a light to walk by: Some commentators have said this means on the Day of Resurrection and refers to the light mentioned in the verse, *with their light moving swiftly before them and on their right* (57:12).

However, the problem with this interpretation is that there is no evidence that this light refers to the same the light the faithful will have on the Day of Resurrection. After all, they shall have both a light to walk by in this world, as we see in the verse, *is he who was lifeless, then We gave him life and provided him with a light by which he walks among the people, like one who dwells in a manifold darkness which he cannot leave?* (6:122), and a light to walk by in the Hereafter, as we see in the verse, *the day you will see the faithful, men and women, with their light moving swiftly before them and on their right* (57:12).

God completes this promise to grant the faithful two shares of mercy and a light by which they can walk by with a further promise to grant them forgiveness: *... and forgive you, and Allah is all-forgiving, all-merciful*;

لِئَلَّا يَعْلَمَ أَهْلُ الْكِتَابِ أَلَّا يَقْدِرُونَ عَلَىٰ شَيْءٍ مِنْ فَضْلِ اللَّهِ وَأَنَّ

الْفَضْلَ بِيَدِ اللَّهِ يُؤْتِيهِ مَنْ يَشَاءُ ۚ وَاللَّهُ ذُو الْفَضْلِ الْعَظِيمِ ﴿٢٩﴾

(57:29) ***lest the People of the Book think*** **(li–illā yaʿlam)** ***that they have no power over anything of Allah's grace, and that all grace is in Allah's hand which He grants to whomever He wishes and Allah is dispenser of a great grace.***

Based on the context in which it occurs, this verse appears to shift from addressing the believers directly to address the Prophet individually. The meaning of *ʿilm* in the phrase, *lest the People of the Book think...*, is any kind of belief (i.e. 'to think'), rather than knowledge in the strict sense of the word *ʿilm*. The pronoun '*they*' in *...that they have no power over anything of Allah's grace* refers to the faithful. This verse alludes to the rationale behind the preceding verse.

Therefore the meaning is: 'We only commanded them to have faith upon faith and promised the to give them a double share of mercy, a light to walk by, and forgiveness for their sins lest the People of the Book imagine that the faithful have no power over anything of God's grace, in contrast to the believers from the People of the Book. This is because the faithful will be given their reward twice if they believe.'

Some have said that the preposition *li-illā* ('lest') in the phrase *li-illā yaʿlam* ('lest... think') is superfluous and the pronoun *they* in *that they have no power* refers to the People of the Book. In this case, the meaning becomes: 'We have only promised this to the faithful so that the People of the Book will know, when they say, "Whoever of us believe in your Book will have two rewards and whoever does not believe in it will have a single reward for their belief in our book," that they have no power over anything of God's grace so long as they do not believe.' However, it will be evident to the reader that this is a rather tortuous reading of the verse.

... and that all grace is in Allah's hand which He grants to whomever He wishes and Allah is dispenser of a great grace: This is also the object of *so that the People of the Book may know*, in other words: 'We have only promised them this because of such-and-such and because all grace is in God's hand, and God is the dispenser of great grace.'

There are other readings and interpretations of the verse which are without merit and which we have, therefore, omitted from our discussion here.

Examining Narrations

(1) It is narrated in *Jawāmiʿ al-jamiʿ* that Gabriel descended with the Balance and gave it to Noah, saying: 'Give it to your people that they might weigh with it.'

(2) In *al-Iḥtijāj*, it is narrated from ʿAlī in a tradition about the verse, *and We sent down iron, in which there is great might* (57:25): 'His sending it down means that He created it.'

(3) In *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, it is narrated from Ibn Masʿūd: 'I rode with the Messenger of God upon his donkey. He said, "O son of a slave's mother, do you know from whence the Israelites contrived monasticism?" I said, "God and His Messenger know best." He said: "Tyrants gained power over them after Jesus and they sinned against God, so the people of faith were enraged, so they fought them. The people of faith were defeated three times, until only a few of them remained. They said, 'If we rise up against them again, they will annihilate us, and no one will remain to call others to the religion. So instead, let us disperse through the earth until God sends the prophet that Jesus foretold would come'"—meaning Muḥammad—"so they scattered themselves amongst the caves of mountains and devised monasticism as a way of living. Then, there were those of them who held fast to their religion and others who disbelieved." Then he recited the verse, *But as for monasticism, they innovated it—We had not prescribed it for them* (57:27).

Then he said to me, "O son of a slave's mother, do you know what is the monasticism of my nation?" I said, "God and His Messenger know best." He said, "Emigration, striving in the way of God, prayer, fasting, Ḥajj, and ʿUmra."'

(4) In *al-Kāfī*, al-Kulaynī narrates via a chain of narrators going back to Abī al-Jārūd: 'I said to Abū al-Jaʿfar (al-Bāqir), "God has given the People of the Book abundant good." He said, "How so?" I said, "The verses, *Those to whom We gave the Book before it are the ones who believe in it … Those will be given their reward two times for their patience* (28:52–54)." He said, "God has given you the like of what He has given them. Then he recited the verse, *O you who have faith! Be wary of Allah and have faith in His Messenger. He will grant you a double share of His mercy and give you a light to walk by*—meaning an Imām you can follow" (57:28).'

(5) In *Majmaʿ al-bayān*, it is narrated from Saʿīd b. Jubayr: 'The Messenger of God sent Jaʿfar with seventy riders to al-Najāshī to invite him to have faith. He went and invited him, and he accepted their preaching and believed in it. And when it was time for Jaʿfar to depart, those of al-Najāshī's subjects who believed—and there were forty of them—said, "Permit us to go to this prophet and submit to him personally."

So they went with Jaʿfar, and when they saw the special status of the Muslims, they sought the leave of the Prophet and said, "O Prophet of God, we have wealth, and we see the special status of the Muslims, so if you will permit us, we will go and return with our wealth and share it with the Muslims." So, he granted them leave, they went and returned with their wealth and shared it with the Muslims. Then God revealed about them, *Those to whom We gave the Book before it are the ones who believe in it... and spend out of what We have provided them*. And this referred to the monies they shared with the Muslims. When members of the People of the Book who did not believe in the Prophet heard the verse, *those will be given their reward two times for their patience*, they mocked the Muslims and said, "O group of Muslims, those of us who believe in our book and your book will have two rewards, and whoever of us believes in our book alone shall have one reward. So what makes you any better than us?" That is when God sent down the verse, *O you who have faith! Be wary of Allah and have faith in His Messenger...*—and, in doing so, He promised them not only a double share of reward, but also light and forgiveness. Then He said, *so that the People of the Book may know ...* (57:29).'

~ End of Chapter 57 ~

The end. All praise be to Almighty God.

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